



# COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Joint Subcommittee Hearing Statement of Rep. Lou Correa (D-CA) Subcommittee on Counterterrorism, Law Enforcement & Intelligence**

### ***Unmanned Aerial Systems: An Examination of the Use of Drones in Emergency Response***

**May 8, 2024**

Given that this week is Police Week, I would like to thank our law enforcement witnesses for being here today.

Turning to our hearing today, Chairmen Pfluger and D'Esposito and Ranking Member Carter, thank you for leading this discussion on the use of Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) in emergency response.

I would like to start by acknowledging that UAS, or drone programs, have a long history of utilization by militaries throughout the world. Recently, with technological advances, UAS programs have evolved and been adopted by Federal and local law enforcement and emergency response agencies.

In fact, in my home state of California, the Chula Vista police department became the first to routinely respond to 911 calls by flying drones. Chula Vista's "Drone as First Responder" concept is proactive rather than reactive in that drones are stationed at permanent locations throughout the city to help give officers real-time information before they arrive at a crime scene. In my District, Fullerton Police also use drones to provide support to its officers and their emergency operations.

Today, I am honored to have some Orange County representation on the panel with Division Chief Kevin Fetterman testifying on behalf of the Orange County Fire Authority. The Orange County Fire Authority's drone program has assisted in search and mission rescues during residential fires, where firefighters deployed drones to quickly search homes and determine that residents were not trapped inside.

In a 2021 incident on the 261 toll road, OC's Fire Authority deployed a drone with infrared capability to better assess the scene and extinguish the fire. Teaming up with the local police, the drone was also used to locate the suspected arsonist who was hiding in the bushes.

Unmanned aerial systems are also used on the Federal level in the planning of National Special Security Events, referred to as NSSes, to include major sporting events, one of which will be held in Los Angeles – the 2028 Summer Olympics. Despite these positive examples of growing UAS programs nationwide, there are also concerns about their use.

People are concerned that the proliferation of drones could enable a "surveillance society," in which our every move may be monitored, tracked, recorded, and scrutinized by government agencies. This concern has been heightened by reporting that drones have been deployed to monitor First Amendment protected activity, like during the summer of 2020 protests against police brutality.

I believe that all of my colleagues here today appreciate the many beneficial uses of drone technology, particularly in emergency response, I believe we can also all agree that such technology has to be deployed in a manner that protects individuals' privacy and civil rights and liberties.

So today I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about the novel ways in which drones are enhancing our emergency response capabilities but also about how we can ensure safe and responsible use of this technology.

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