



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Emergency Preparedness, Response, & Recovery Subcommittee Chairwoman Val Demings (D-FL)

Creating a More Resilient Nation: Stakeholder Perspectives

May 17, 2022

We are here to discuss how we can build a more resilient Nation and keep every person in Florida and across the country safe. First responders, law enforcement, and emergency managers are the bedrock of public safety in our communities and crucial to our safety and resiliency. We need to fund and support law enforcement and first responders so that they are ready and able to answer the call when the time comes.

We all know the challenges. Crime and violence, climate change and stronger storms, and rising levels of domestic terrorism which puts every American at risk. This past weekend ten Americans lost their lives in Buffalo, New York, to a domestic terrorist radicalized by ideologies of hate and exclusion that have been spread and promoted on television, at political rallies, and even here in the halls of Congress.

According to the Center for Strategic & International Studies, “the years 2020 and 2021 had the highest numbers of domestic terrorist attacks and plots.” And on top of the tragic loss of life in Buffalo, our nation saw mass shootings this same past weekend at a California church and a Texas flea market, and other violent crime across the country.

As we confront these challenges and work to ensure that our first responders are prepared and our communities are resilient, it is critical that we support the Urban Area Security Initiative, also known as the UASI program.

During my 27-year career in law enforcement, I saw the benefits of UASI in Orlando. As a Chief of Police, I relied on this critical program to help keep our community safe and ensure that our officers were ready to respond if the worst should happen. UASI funding helps ensure that our first responders in Orlando and 35 other jurisdictions across the nation are adequately equipped and trained to do their jobs safely and effectively.

I strongly support efforts to strengthen the UASI program. As we confront violent extremists at home and abroad, this funding is critical to keeping every person who lives, works, and travels in Florida safe. Last year, I introduced, H.R. 5615, the “Homeland Security Capabilities Preservation Act,” which recognizes the importance of preserving security capabilities achieved with UASI funding for communities. I am pleased that the legislation passed the House this year on March 7. I will continue to do my part and push for this legislation to become law.

In the fall, this subcommittee held two hearings on the importance of strong communications networks. As many of us here today can attest, robust communications technology is critically important for keeping our communities safe during emergencies and building resiliency. For this reason, I introduced legislation (H.R. 6768) that would reauthorize the First Responder Network Authority, known as FirstNet.

FirstNet has supported thousands of public safety agencies by empowering first responders, law enforcement, and emergency managers with the tools and technology they need to coordinate their responses.

The program was established with resiliency in mind, and we need to continue to preserve the gains in communications it has made. Climate change, too, presents a tremendous challenge and test of resiliency.

To be clear, the climate crisis is already upon us. We in Florida know the dangers of stronger hurricanes and rising floodwaters. We must do more to prevent these storms from worsening, and to support all communities when disaster strikes, especially those who are currently underserved and least able to bounce back.

The Administration is working to ensure that underserved communities can access mitigation funds. Additionally, FEMA's Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities, or BRIC program, is directing a portion of funds to flow to disadvantaged communities. However, Congress still needs to pass real legislation to ensure that every American community has the tools they need to weather disasters and to rebuild afterward.

I am a proud cosponsor of Chairman Bennie Thompson's legislation, H.R. 7668, the "Federal Emergency Management Advancement of Equity Act," which will help make disaster response efforts fairer and more effective. We all know that we face many challenges. But as we work to confront and triumph over these threats, we have an opportunity to fix old problems, improve emergency responses, support our first responders, and build a resilient, strong nation that has the tools to defeat any challenge.

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