



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

The Nonprofit Security Grant Program and Protecting Houses of Worship: A View from the American Jewish Community

February 8, 2022

Thank you to our witnesses for joining us today to discuss the how the dynamic terrorism threat landscape impacts the American Jewish community and the importance of Federal support to make their communities more secure.

As someone who spent nearly three decades in law enforcement, I was extremely troubled to see Neo-Nazis shouting anti-Semitic slurs while parading through the streets of Orlando in recent days. I am relieved that the individuals who viciously attacked a Jewish student have been charged with hate crime assault and grand theft. For one of the group's leaders, this is the second time he has been charged with committing violent acts against innocent bystanders this year. These hateful and violent acts followed several incidents in which anti-Semitic flyers were left outside homes across South Florida.

We are joined today by Rabbi Yosef Konikov from Chabad of South Orlando, who I have been honored to join for joyful celebrations with his congregation. I appreciate your leadership during these difficult events in our community and stand with you in rejecting anti-Semitic attacks on our neighbors, friends, and families.

All of this comes at a time when, as we learned at last week's hearing, we are seeing "fringe" extremist ideologies being mainstreamed and violent ideologies from across the spectrum embrace anti-Semitism. Let me be clear-- Anti-Semitism and targeted violence against religious institutions have no place in the United States of America.

Today, 20 years after 9/11, the terrorism threat landscape is far more complex with nonprofits such as religious institutions increasingly targeted by domestic and foreign terrorists. Last month, the nation collectively "held its breath" as congregants at Sabbath service in a Texas synagogue were held at gunpoint by a terrorist.

I commend the heroic actions of Rabbi Cytron-Walker, one of our witnesses here today, who grabbed a chair and heaved it at the gunman, allowing the congregants to escape. During the Colleyville attack, Rabbi Cytron-Walker credited his quick actions security to security training that funded, in part, by the Nonprofit Security Grant Program or NSGP. Under this program at-risk religious institutions and other non-profits receive support to implement protective measures. These grants are critically important for religious institutions, and they keep communities safe, which is more important now than ever.

As the terrorism landscape has grown more complex and houses of worship are increasingly being targeted, the demand for this program has risen exponentially. To meet this demand, Congress has increased funding for Nonprofit Security Grant Program. Even with the recent increases, we still see a growing need for organizations to access this funding. With the rise of attacks against faith-based communities, we must continue to invest in their security.

Throughout my time in Congress, I have consistently advocated for increased funding for this critical program. I was pleased to support a \$100 million increase in the “Build Back Better Act” last year and, last week, joined my colleagues in calling for additional appropriations for the program for next year.

We have a great panel today. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about the challenges the American Jewish community faces and what Congress can do to aid them.

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