

OFFICIAL TESTIMONY
OF
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[INTRODUCTION]

Chairwoman Demings and Ranking Member Cammack, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. It is an honor to speak with you and share the work my Office is doing to keep the residents, visitors, and institutions of New Jersey safe, especially with regard to homeland security grants and emergency preparedness.

The New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness (NJOHSP) is tasked with coordinating the State's counterterrorism, cybersecurity, and emergency preparedness efforts across all levels of government, law enforcement, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector. NJOHSP is charged with bolstering New Jersey's resources for counterterrorism, critical infrastructure protection, cybersecurity, preparedness, training, and federal grants management.

New Jersey faces complex security challenges driven by evolving threats, but we know those threats neither start nor end at our State borders. In New Jersey, we pride ourselves on the partnerships we have developed and strengthened with our federal, state, and local partners to address our shared domestic security. We recognize that our work is never complete, and continual improvement is the only way to succeed at protecting New Jersey and the country. While we provide details on our ongoing efforts, be mindful that we always seek to improve our strategic approach on homeland security and preparedness.

I thank the committee for the opportunity to share our thoughts, discuss our challenges, and collaborate on future steps as we all work toward securing our Homeland.

[NJOHSP ACTIONS]

Last year brought compounded challenges to our country and each individual state. New Jersey is the most densely populated state in the nation, increasing the difficulty of containing a widespread respiratory virus. We took actions necessary to slow the spread of COVID-19, bolster our hospital capabilities, and support our communities. Like other states, we were not immune to the devastating effects of the pandemic; however, the work and dedication of our medical professionals remains immeasurable.

As the fight continues, we remain appreciative for the federal government's support. I encourage committee members to stay engaged with state governments to support short- and long-term response and recovery efforts focused on both medical response capabilities and economic recovery and growth.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, we witnessed humanity and kindness in our society. Unfortunately, there was also an unacceptable attack on our democracy and its institutions. The events of January 6 were the culmination of an existing domestic threat that has been pervasive in our country for some time. These criminal acts were attempts to stop the orderly business of our government.

New Jersey's analytical capabilities have focused on domestic extremism and the threat it presents. We were one of the first states in the nation to sharpen focus on groups in the United States

perpetuating extreme ideologies meant to motivate individuals to violent action. We have worked closely with partners within our State to prevent violence against individuals, groups, or government and community institutions. NJOHSP continuously assesses strategic and tactical trends concerning international and domestic extremist ideologies and organizations. We proactively collect, compile, and aggregate information to generate intelligence products, which are used to inform our law enforcement partners, the private sector, and the public on potential threats to the State, its residents, and visitors. Through these timely, accurate, relevant, and insightful assessments, we spearheaded efforts to remain ahead of the ever-changing threat landscape, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in an environment unlike we have experienced before.

NJOHSP observed that COVID-19 restrictions, disinformation, and misinformation would converge with the 2020 Presidential election and mounting civil unrest nationwide. Specifically, we saw domestic extremists, foreign terrorist organizations, and nation-state threat actors attempting to leverage disinformation to hinder economic recovery and vaccination efforts, fuel anti-government sentiment, and spread false narratives to sow discord throughout the United States. In response, NJOHSP increased its efforts beginning in March 2020 to combat these inaccuracies and provide up-to-date knowledge and guidance from trusted authorities to help navigate the sheer volume of inaccurate information.

In September, NJOHSP released its 2020-2021 Supplemental Threat Assessment, which detailed how the convergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, civil unrest, and 2020 Presidential election influenced the national threat landscape. The analysis highlighted how evolving security threats would continue to impact New Jersey and the United States for the remainder of 2020 and through 2021. The following predictive analysis was forecasted:

- The COVID-19 pandemic and polarizing sentiments surrounding its impact would worsen the convergence of the 2020 Presidential election and mounting civil unrest across the nation.
- Domestic extremists—primarily anarchist, anti-government and racially motivated—would continue to manipulate national incidents such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 Presidential election, and civil unrest to further their agendas and remain a threat.
- Nation-state threat actors’ expanding disinformation campaigns that exploit COVID-19, election security, and civil unrest would persist into 2021 to exacerbate domestic tensions and challenge US global credibility.
- Foreign terrorist organizations would continue to exploit COVID-19, Presidential election dissonance, and civil unrest to create conflict, inspire extremists to radicalize, and provoke homegrown violent extremists to conduct attacks.

As we all continue to address threats within our borders, we should work collaboratively to address root causes, prevent violence of any kind, eschew political opportunism, and respect the foundational rights upon which this country is built. No matter the ideology of the threat actors, violence against any individual is both wrong and criminal. Our laws are set by legislative bodies, and we have tools to combat the type of actions witnessed on January 6 through the current statutory constructs. We will continue to use those tools to prevent violence and punish

perpetrators while respecting the rights of every individual to express their beliefs, opinions, and speech in a peaceful manner.

Not unlike years past, we have been faced with multiple diverse threat streams in this country. Recent natural and manmade incidents have shaped our actions this year and will continue to influence those to come. However, this year brings with it an unfortunate milestone for our nation: the 20th anniversary of terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. For the past 20 years, the homeland security paradigm has evolved through proactive strategy and reactive regrets. The focus on public safety remains the same, but tactics and strategies change with new lessons learned or priorities identified. Through it all, some constants remain firmly in place, beginning with the obvious that neither manmade terrorist events nor natural disasters respect state borders. Collaboration is key and teamwork is foundational at all levels of government and with the business community and the public.

In New Jersey, we are immensely proud of our recent work and continue to embrace a whole-of-community approach to security, focusing on our communities of faith and business. NJOHSP's Interfaith Advisory Council continues to be a model for the country in government to faith-based community engagement. We foster open dialogue and promote honest conversations in a collaborative approach to security with more than 3,500 members. We also recently launched the New Jersey Shield program, a collaborative effort with the New Jersey State Police and New Jersey's intelligence fusion center. This program will enhance public-private partnerships by enabling true bilateral information and resource sharing. It connects our public safety personnel and private sector to each other and with the other global Shield jurisdictions in operation. It creates the mesh network of information and resources that has been a priority since that fateful day in September of 2001.

Our efforts in New Jersey continue to focus on suspicious activity reporting that remains vital to law enforcement efforts. The New Jersey Suspicious Activity Reporting System, or NJSARS, is part of an ongoing effort in New Jersey to increase threat reporting. NJSARS shares information from suspicious activity reports (SARs) with law enforcement partners throughout the State. It is also linked to the FBI's national SAR system known as eGuardian, which partners with the Nationwide SAR Initiative to form a single repository accessible to thousands of law enforcement personnel and analysts nationwide. We collect and analyze over 1,000 SARs every year and immediately share all leads with the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force.

Our relationship with the FBI remains strong, and its dedicated team of professionals continues to support and inform our efforts. NJOHSP has recently taken a leading role in New Jersey to combat increasing counterintelligence threats. Since 2018, we have partnered with the FBI in following its Joint Terrorism Task Force model to create the nation's first Counterintelligence Joint Task Force. Members of this task force have worked diligently to mitigate threats presented by foreign state-sponsored actors seeking to conduct intelligence operations in New Jersey. Threat actors have attempted to unlawfully acquire intellectual property and access sensitive information in furtherance of their countries' foreign policy and economic goals. These illegal activities pose security challenges to New Jersey, with the potential to become significant national security threats.

These and other programs have been foundational to the success we have realized in New Jersey. Their implementation is a direct result of the resources the federal government has provided. We remain appreciative for that assistance and collaboration as we move forward into new endeavors. Similarly, the federal government is changing some programmatic directions. With the new administration, we see the policy adaptations that will affect state and local programs moving forward. Whereas one administration may have stringent investment priorities for grants or fewer risk-based jurisdictional awards, others broaden discretion and expand the risk-based jurisdictional grants. Ultimately, we recognize that all of us in this discipline are working toward the same goals and objectives, just through different programmatic paths.

We recognize the need for and support the identification of priorities within the homeland security grant program. While each state has its own needs, we understand the importance of enterprise capability building across the nation. NJOHSP serves as New Jersey's State Administrative Agency to administer homeland security grant funds provided by the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) or the State of New Jersey. With this designation, NJOHSP is responsible for ensuring compliance with all the fiduciary and programmatic administration requirements of federal and State homeland security grant programs designed to make New Jersey a safer place to live, visit, work, and worship. NJOHSP's administration and management of homeland security grant programs is built upon three foundational guiding principles: inclusivity, transparency, and accountability. In an effort to establish clear guidelines for the allocation and distribution of discretionary funding, we follow five basic criteria when managing and administering federal and State homeland security and preparedness grant funding:

- Follow a risk-based system—risk being defined as a function of threat, vulnerability, and consequence assessment
- Significantly benefit New Jersey's emergency response community
- Link to our State preparedness goals to prevent terrorist attacks, protect critical infrastructure, and reduce vulnerability to terrorism, mitigate terrorist attacks, respond to incidents of terrorism quickly and effectively, and recover from terrorist attacks in order to restore quality of life
- Support the national and State priorities and core capabilities; e.g., interoperability, regionalization, and information sharing
- Avoid duplication where wasteful

To attain a more quantitative understanding of the risks that New Jersey faces and to better inform our investments of federal and State homeland security funds for many of our strategic funding, planning, and preparedness programs, we divided the State into four planning and funding regions: Urban Areas Security Initiative Region (UASI), Northwest Region, Shore Region, and Delaware River Region. This regionalization approach facilitates a "bottom-up" planning framework, which informs a Statewide preparedness roadmap. At the State level, our Domestic Security Preparedness Task Force addresses both regional and Statewide preparedness capability initiatives.

While achieving the foundational guiding principles, several tangible outcomes have resulted that go well beyond grant management activities. None is greater than the profound sense of collaboration between both multiple levels of government (local, county, state, federal) and various first responder communities (fire, emergency medical, law enforcement, emergency management

services, etc.), as well as the buildout of public and private partnerships. Further, the federal and State nonprofit security grant programs have brought greater understanding and collaboration between law enforcement professionals and houses of worship that results in greater detailed mitigation efforts against terrorism and acts of violence. Incredibly, it is the grant funding that brings together the “whole community” to address ongoing and emergent threats associated with terrorism.

To date, NJOHSP has administered over \$1.3 billion of grant funding and currently is responsible for over \$175 million in open federal and State homeland security and preparedness grant funds. In 2018, a new State-funded grant program, the Nonprofit Security Grant Pilot Program, was established to assist eligible nonprofit organizations in enhancing physical security with the funding of security personnel and target hardening equipment. This program continues to grow in terms of interest and funding amounts. There are efforts to make this program permanent by way of State legislative enactment.

We encourage the administration and DHS to sharpen its focus on risk-based decision-making as program priorities are developed. Through risk-informed processes, we also encourage DHS to collaborate with state homeland security leaders on future mandated programs and grant allocations. This process would allow for advanced planning to occur with new priorities, rather than awaiting an annual notice of funding opportunity and having only the application submission window to impart federal planning priorities.

As a state with a high-risk urban area, we continue our support of the UASI program. Here, too, we welcome continued risk-informed decisions about funding allocations, priorities, and expansion of jurisdictions. While the homeland security grant program has been with us since the beginning, we appreciate the federal government’s attempts to broaden resources provided into other programs such as targeted violence prevention. Again, collaboration with the states will strengthen these programs and help inform where both financial and programmatic resources would be most efficiently invested.

We encourage DHS to harmonize the program with all of its components as new programs are developed. There remain instances where some components of DHS may not be engrained with the awareness, knowledge, or rationale of a new program, making full collaboration within the states difficult. This is most important in those areas where one component may be developing the policy of a new program while another component is developing the administrative necessities of a related grant program. We understand the difficulties in creating national programs and appreciate DHS’ continued work and perseverance.

One noticeable area of continued focus is cybersecurity. NJOHSP, through its New Jersey Cybersecurity and Communications Integration Cell (NJCCIC), is charged with leading and coordinating New Jersey’s cybersecurity efforts while building resiliency to cyber threats throughout the State. We do so by focusing on the confluence of physical and cyber risk, using enterprise risk management techniques to drive our decision-making. We focus on information sharing with both the public and private sectors, and we oversee the State government Garden State Network to ensure that critical government functions continue uninterrupted.

Cybersecurity challenges are addressed with a wide-area lens in New Jersey. We recognize that threats in the cyber realm are both an end target and a vector through which other consequences may manifest. Whether the support of a criminal enterprise, the malicious destruction of control mechanisms, or the interruption of critical services, cybersecurity consequences can affect a multitude of unrelated targets. It is why our preparedness posture focuses on integrated threats with a goal of agnostic consequence management. No matter what caused the issue, we strive to develop capabilities to deal with it. It is the quintessential progression through prevention, protection, response, and recovery and the basis upon which we rest our strategy.

With this approach in mind, we welcome conversations with DHS about dedicated funding or prioritization for cybersecurity. Unlike the physical realm, cybersecurity threats, vulnerabilities, and consequences change the result of the risk equation. In doing so, focused spending on cybersecurity will require a collaborative approach among states and the federal government to ensure that risk is properly identified and prioritized in new programs.

[CONCLUSION]

As we all work on today's challenges, we constantly remain aware of what tomorrow may bring. Looking to the future, we must ensure that we are not preparing only for the most recent incident. The last year has highlighted many of the challenges for which our nation's preparedness could improve. Whether focusing on supply chain resiliency, the criticality of functions that drive our markets and economy, or the services that support our way of life, we must constantly adapt. In New Jersey, we have spent the last four years trying to position for these evolutions. In that vein, we applaud DHS' movement toward critical functions and away from a singular focus on infrastructure assets. We appreciate DHS' sharpened focus on collective capabilities and priorities for the grant programs.

We will remain dedicated to further collaboration with our partners at the local, county, state, and federal levels to work on risk mitigation efforts for both the short and long term. NJOHSP relies on partner engagement, and relationship building is essential to our core goals. Through the development of working groups, robust information sharing, increased interagency interactions, and public awareness campaigns, NJOHSP has remained successful in meeting its mission. NJOHSP will continue to generate accurate assessments of national security threats both at home and abroad and investigate every potential threat that could impact the communities in New Jersey.

Chairwoman Demings, Ranking Member Cammack, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, I thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.

I look forward to your questions and yield back to the Chairwoman.