



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

Testimony of Mr. Michael G. Masters  
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Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery  
Committee on Homeland Security  
United States House of Representatives

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## OVERVIEW

Chairwoman Demings, Chairwoman Slotkin, Ranking Member Cammack, Ranking Member Pfluger, Distinguished Members of the Subcommittees: America's Jewish community is under attack. Thank you for taking action to stop it.

I am Michael Masters, CEO and National Director of the Secure Community Network, or SCN. It is an honor to appear before you to participate in this hearing.

SCN is the official safety and security organization of the Jewish community in North America. I have spent close to 20 years serving in the military, law enforcement, and homeland security. Today, I dedicate myself to serving and protecting the Jewish community.

It is a community that is under threat.

To help us protect Jewish lives, and those of all faiths, we are counting on you – the members of these two subcommittees – to support the funding desperately needed to prevent further assaults and to train people on what to do in case of an attack.

Without you, the faith-based community would be in even greater danger.

SCN works on behalf of and with The Jewish Federations of North America and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, covering over 50 national non-profit organizations,<sup>1</sup> 146 Jewish Federations, and over 300 independent Jewish communities,<sup>2</sup> collectively representing over 90 percent of the Jewish community across North America. We have addressed threats impacting, worked in, and responded to incidents in many of your congressional districts, including across Florida, Michigan, and – of course – Texas.

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<sup>1</sup> "Member Organizations," Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, accessed January 6, 2020, <https://www.conferenceofpresidents.org/about/members>.

<sup>2</sup> "About The Jewish Federations of North America," The Jewish Federations of North America, accessed January 6, 2020, <https://jewishfederations.org/about-jfna>.

We are the Jewish community's official liaison with federal law enforcement, particularly the FBI and DHS. Every day, our team is sharing intelligence and information with local, state, and federal law enforcement and community partners, developing and helping Jewish community institutions implement best practice safety policies, providing assessments of Jewish facilities, consulting on physical security measures, conducting life-saving training and exercises, and – unfortunately – responding to incidents.

It is critical for your subcommittees to understand that August 22, 2021, was a day that helped save lives.

That was the day that SCN worked with the Jewish Federation of Fort Worth & Tarrant County to lead a training exercise at Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville, Texas. It was attended by Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker and 21 congregants.

SCN worked with the Rabbi and congregants on how to recognize suspicious behavior and activity, as well as what to do during an active threat situation: to “Commit to Action.”

While we provided the training, the Rabbi and other members of the congregation did the hard work, particularly on January 15<sup>th</sup>.

Let me just say how honored I am – how moved I am – to be participating in this hearing with Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker. We teach people in our trainings to Commit to Action. This is what the Rabbi and other hostages did throughout that horrendous day, and certainly when he and the other two hostages positioned themselves near a door, and when he threw a chair at the terrorist who had taken them hostage – providing critical moments to escape.

Thanks to the coordinated efforts of law enforcement, the work that we at SCN did with the community, but, most importantly, the actions of Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker and the other hostages – their calm, courageous, and coordinated efforts – we are able to talk today about what *we know* works. What *we know* saves lives. This is what SCN is teaching around the country.

Our job is to secure our community so that the Jewish people can pray, celebrate, and gather in safety.

SCN is a nonprofit organization supported by a network of generous private donors and partners. Our team of former intelligence, law enforcement, security, and military personnel are not volunteers or private contractors. We are security professionals whose full-time job is to serve the Jewish community – supporting communities around the country and through our Federation system as well as with national partners.

I have personally served in several law enforcement and homeland security roles: a police officer trained in special weapons and tactics and a commissioned officer in the United States Marine Corps. I previously served as the Chief of Staff of the Chicago Police Department and as the Executive Director of the Department of Homeland Security for Cook County, Illinois. I previously served as the Co-Chair of the Secretary of DHS' Non-disaster Preparedness Grant Review Task Force.

As a security expert informed by my personal experience, I can attest – without equivocation – that FEMA's Nonprofit Security Grant Program, or NSGP, has placed the nonprofit, faith-based community in a better position to stay alive. The NSGP grants that you vote to fund every year provide bulletproof doors, shatterproof glass, secure entry systems, panic buttons, and so much more. You also help make the delivery of our life-saving training programs possible.

This means that more Americans – regardless of faith – can worship and gather in peace.

Security in our houses of worship is critical not just for the physical protection of the faith community but also for the very preservation of religious freedom in this nation. We all must feel safe to freely exercise our faith.

The Jewish liturgy teaches us to welcome the stranger. We know, given current conditions, that we must do that in a manner which is also safe and secure, balancing the diverse needs – and diversity – of our community. We must ensure that our faith institutions remain open and

welcoming, while being safe and secure, from our schools and senior centers to our camps, community centers, and college campuses.

We do not want the United States to become – like too many countries – a location where our faith institutions look like military fortresses. To put it simply, that is not who we are as Americans, nor should we allow it to be.

Comprehensive, best practice approaches to security – like those SCN implements with Jewish Federations and other partners across the country – allow for that. The NSGP is a vital part of our efforts, supporting our work and the open, free practice of religion in this society. We know the demand for NSGP funds far outpaces available funds. Any additional funds Congress decides to appropriate will enable the good work that is already being done to reach more communities.

### THREAT PICTURE

In coordination with our partners in local, state, and federal law enforcement, we assess that the threats facing the Jewish community are more complex and dynamic than at any other time in the nation's history. At their core, they derive from an evil that is thousands of years old: antisemitism.

The Jewish community not only remains the number one target of religiously motivated hate crimes, but we have seen a rise in these events to near-historic levels, as well as increases in antisemitic incidents across the nation.<sup>3</sup>

The number of U.S. domestic terrorism cases under investigation by the FBI more than doubled in 2021 from the year prior, with the FBI having roughly 2,700 open domestic terrorism investigations. To meet the evolving threat, the FBI has surged resources, increasing personnel working on these issues by 260%.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents: Year in Review 2018," The Anti-Defamation League, accessed January 6, 2020, <https://www.adl.org/audit2018>.

<sup>4</sup> Wolfe, Jan, "U.S. domestic terrorism investigations have more than doubled – FBI director," *Reuters.com*, <https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/us-domestic-terrorism-investigations-have-more-than-doubled-fbi-director-2021-09-21/>

As law enforcement has increased its efforts, in this environment, we must do all we can to ensure that our institutions and communities of faith are protected.

We see that in our work at SCN every day.

During 2021, SCN's Duty Desk, which is staffed by a team of intelligence analysts and is part of our National Jewish Security Operations Command Center, or JSOCC, took in over 11,000 incidents, requests, and reports – ranging from suspicious individuals to threats. We referred hundreds of items to local, state, and federal law enforcement, to include 79 referrals to the FBI.

Just in the last week, our JSOCC identified two individuals who were threatening to attack synagogues, and kill Jews. Both leads were immediately passed to law enforcement. This is going on every hour of every day. SCN is constantly receiving and quickly sharing threat information with our partners in law enforcement for their analysis and action.

The attack on January 15<sup>th</sup> in Colleyville, Texas was just the latest example of the threat that our community faces. But it was also the latest example that we know how to improve the safety of congregants, and a stark reminder of why this hearing is so important.

### ADDRESSING THE THREATS

Safety and security are priorities for the Jewish community. To address this, SCN was created to work on behalf of the Jewish community. We are working to build a protective, proactive shield over the North American Jewish community, in coordination with local Federations and our national partners. We ensure that solutions are tailored to each community or partner and rooted in consistent best practices across the community.

We learn from the Talmud, we don't rely on miracles. We hope for them, we pray for them, but we don't *rely* on them.

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We are not powerless.

Last year, SCN trained over 17,000 members of the Jewish community – two of whom were Rabbi Cytron-Walker and one of the other hostages. The training in Colleyville – from its development to our delivery – occurred because we came together – SCN, the Jewish Federation, local law enforcement, and – most importantly – the community, to prepare. We – collectively – committed to action.

Our work did not occur just on one day, either. The training on August 22<sup>nd</sup> was one of a series that SCN provided to organizations in Tarrant County, and part of our efforts that also included assessments of synagogues and consultation on physical security.

There is a lesson to be learned from Colleyville.

While we will not choose the time and place of the next incident, we can choose our preparation.

This is what the members of that community did. It is what the Rabbi and his congregants did, and they are alive today.

Every Jewish facility in America must be trained. Every member of our community must be trained. This is true for the entirety of the faith community in America. But not just any training will do. The training must be professional. It must be detailed. And it must be ongoing. Just like we do with fire safety in our schools and workplaces.

Thankfully, SCN and others, to include law enforcement, conducted training at Congregation Beth Israel, but there are too many facilities and too many members of our community who have not yet been reached. We want to make our life-saving trainings available to every member of the Jewish community in North America.

This is a priority for our community, and we purposefully work to extend that shield to every community, and to enhance those communities with existing security – most notably through a collaboration led by The Jewish Federations of North America and supported by SCN.

But we are not doing the work alone. In addition to the ongoing and committed support that we receive from law enforcement at all levels – with special recognition to the FBI and our public safety partners at DHS – Congress plays a critical role by funding FEMA’s Nonprofit Security Grant Program.

We are thankful to each of you for your support of the work we are doing. We need each of you...and the multi-faith community needs your support now more than ever.

#### IMPACT OF THE NON-PROFIT SECURITY GRANT PROGRAM (NSGP)

When SCN creates a Community Security Initiative in a community, most often in partnership with the Jewish Federation, we implement a comprehensive, strategic security framework. As a result, we see a 400% increase in the number of assessments done for our community. These are assessments done by security professionals with backgrounds in law enforcement, and they are supported by our team at SCN.

These assessments are used by the local organizations to inform their application for NSGP funds. Working with the community, SCN’s approach has resulted in a 36% increase in the number of successful NSGP applicants in the first year of a Community Security Initiative.

NSGP funding has made our community more safe and secure. It has placed electronic locks on exterior doors of Jewish community centers, panic buttons in school classrooms, and cameras on synagogues – to include at least one of the cameras that was operating at Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville, which provided vital information to law enforcement during the incident.

It also ensures that all of our institutions – from Charlottesville to Colleyville – can avail themselves of security best practices, including verified physical security solutions.



Each week, we work with communities and law enforcement around the country as they deal with suspicious individuals attempting to gain access to facilities, vandals defacing houses of worship with symbols of hate, and bomb threats to community centers.

In each of these cases, equipment like that which is made possible by the NSGP protects our community.

NSGP funding is now protecting more communities in more places. Recent changes to the program allow organizations in non-urban areas to take better advantage of the program. This was critically important, as the threat picture facing our country has changed. We see that from attacks in Overland Park, Kansas and Charlottesville, Virginia, to Charleston, South Carolina and Colleyville, Texas.

NSGP funds can now be used to support planning, exercises, and training for everyday community members— just like the training SCN provided in Colleyville. Training that can help save lives. For organizations that could not independently support such training this can literally be the difference between life and death.

Every day we are working to build relationships between our community and law enforcement. The NSGP is a component of this, fostering critical cooperation and engagement.

Finally, and importantly, I am deeply appreciative of your efforts to increase funds for this program. We are pleased that Congress increased the funding to \$180 million from \$90 million last year. Yet despite the increase, I understand that requests for NSGP funding from organizations around the country approached \$400 million last year. To meet the need, Congress needs to consider further substantial increases in appropriations.

### CLOSING

From attacks in Pittsburgh and Poway to Charlottesville and Colleyville, the Jewish way of life in the United States of America is under attack.

In each of these attacks, SCN's team was responding.

What is required is a whole community response, including professional security assessments, validated best practices, and training. An attack on any religious institution in this country – regardless of size, location, or affiliation – is an attack on all of us.

No one in this country should ever question whether it is safe to walk into a religious institution.

The NSGP and related efforts have assisted in reducing the threat and providing peace of mind. But there is much more work to do, and we do not have time to lose.

Several weeks ago, we saw the impact: we see it here today in Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker's presence. He and his congregants remained calm. They committed to action. They have shown us by example the difference it can make. Let us honor them and their efforts by being as committed.

Thank you for inviting me to testify today, and thank you for your bipartisan recognition of the importance of improving security and preparedness of the Jewish Community. I am happy to take your questions.

## **About the Secure Community Network**

The Secure Community Network (SCN), a nonprofit 501(c)(3), is the official safety and security organization of the Jewish community in North America. Founded in 2004 under the auspices of The Jewish Federations of North America and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, SCN works on behalf of 146 Federations, the 50 largest Jewish non-profit organizations in North America, and over 300 independent communities as well as with other partners in the public, private, nonprofit, and academic sectors to ensure the safety, security, and resiliency of the Jewish people.

SCN serves as the Jewish community's formal liaison with federal law enforcement and coordinates closely with federal, state and local law enforcement partners on safety and security issues related to the Jewish community; through the organization's Operations Center and Duty Desk, SCN analyzes intelligence and information, providing timely, credible threat and incident information to both law enforcement and community partners. SCN's team of law enforcement, homeland security, and military professionals proactively works with communities and partners across North America to develop and implement strategic frameworks that enhance the safety and security of the Jewish people. This includes developing best practice policies, emergency plans and procedures, undertaking threat and vulnerability assessments of facilities, providing critical, real-world training and exercises to prepare for threats and hazards, offering consultation on safety and security matters, and providing response as well as crisis management support during critical incidents.

SCN is dedicated to ensuring that Jewish organizations and communities, as well as life and culture can not only exist safely and securely, but flourish.

## **About Michael Masters**

Michael G. Masters is the National Director & CEO of the Secure Community Network (SCN). Masters previously served as the Senior Vice President of The Soufan Group, a strategic international security consultancy firm and as the CEO of CivicScape, an advanced predictive analytics company.

Prior, Masters served as the Executive Director of the Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management for Cook County, Illinois, as the Chief of Staff for the Chicago Police Department, and as an assistant to former Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley.

Mr. Masters has served on numerous task forces for the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security and previously served on the Executive Board of the FBI's Chicago Joint Terrorism Task Force.

A Truman and a Gates Cambridge Trust Scholar, Masters received his B.A. from the University of Michigan, MPhil in International Relations from the University of Cambridge, and his J.D. from Harvard Law School, where he served as managing editor for the Harvard International Law Journal.

Masters has held faculty appointments at both the John Marshall School of Law and at Northeastern University and serves as a member of the Board of Trustees of the Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School in Chicago, Illinois, on the Council of The Harry S. Truman Scholarship Foundation, and as the President of The Soufan Center, a non-profit organization dedicated to addressing global security issues.

Masters received a commission in the United States Marine Corps, where he attained the rank of Captain. Certified as a peace officer and a Special Weapons and Tactics operator, Masters continues to serve his community as a part-time police officer.