



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

THE “SECURING AMERICAN NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS AGAINST TERRORISM ACT OF 2019”

As Introduced by Representatives Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS), Peter T. King (R-NY), Bill Pascrell (D-NJ), Steve Stivers (R-OH), Max Rose (D-NY), and Troy Balderson (R-OH)

Background:

In recent years, there has been an increase in violence and threats of violence against nonprofit institutions. Just this past weekend, on April 27, a gunman opened fire on congregants at a Passover celebration in a California synagogue, killing one person and injuring three others. Other noteworthy attacks against innocent people in houses of worship include the April 21 coordinated terrorist attacks on churches and hotels in Sri Lanka that killed nearly 250 people and injured more than 500 people; the March 15 deadly New Zealand mosque shootings, where 50 people were killed; the 2018 Pittsburgh “Tree of Life” synagogue shooting, where 11 people were killed; the 2017 Sutherland Springs, Texas church shooting, where 26 people killed; and the 2015 Charleston, South Carolina Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal church shooting, where nine people were killed; and the 2012 shooting at a Sikh Temple in Milwaukee, WI.

Christopher Wray, the FBI Director, recently testified before Congress that the danger of white nationalist and white nationalist extremists in America is “significant,” adding that, like other extremist groups, they are a “persistent, pervasive threat.”¹ In 2017, prompted by a wave of bomb threats targeting the Jewish Community, the Jewish Community Centers Association of North America released a statement that urged the President and his cabinet, alongside the U.S. Congress, to take “concerted action” to ensure the safety of JCCs and schools.² Also in 2017, then-DHS Secretary John Kelly called the escalating number of threats to houses of worship “unacceptable”³ and an “actual harassment directed at faith-based communities around the

¹ “FBI director says white supremacy is a ‘persistent, pervasive threat’ to the US,” CNN, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/04/04/politics/fbi-director-wray-white-supremacy/index.html> (April 4, 2019).

² Press Release, “JCC Association of North America Outraged by New Rash of Bomb Threats,” JCC Association of North America (Feb. 27, 2017), <http://icca.org/news-and-views/outraged-new-rash-bomb-threats/>.

³ Official Statement by Secretary Kelly, <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2017/03/01/statement-secretary-kelly-dhs-support-jewish-community-centers-enhance-their> (March 1, 2017).

country.”⁴ Subsequently, he directed the Department of Homeland Security to enhance its outreach and support to increase public safety across all communities.

A critical resource to non-profits, since FY 2005, had been the Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NSGP) which provides funding to nonprofit organizations located within areas designated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) areas for security-related and physical security enhancements. In 2017, Congressman Bennie G. Thompson urged the FEMA to review the Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NSGP) to assess the feasibility of making these grants available to organizations outside of UASI jurisdictions.⁵ Congressman Thompson followed up this request with a bill that passed the House of Representatives that would authorize the program and set aside funds for at-risk houses of worship outside of UASI areas.⁶ Subsequently, the FY 2018 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, allowed nonprofits outside of UASIs, for the first time, to apply for \$10 million in security assistance.⁷

Over the past fourteen years, NSGP funding has been provided through annual appropriations but the program was never authorized in law. Enactment of authorizing legislation will enhance predictability to at-risk non-profit institutions and bolster congressional oversight.

Legislation:

This Congress, Chairman Thompson, together with Representatives Peter T. King (R-NY), Bill Pascrell (D-NJ), Steve Stivers (R-OH), Max Rose (D-NY), and Troy Balderson (R-OH) and over eighty other Members of Congress, introduced the “Securing American Non-Profit Organizations Against Terrorism Act of 2019,” to authorize a security grant program for 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organizations that are at risk of a terrorist attack within the Department of Homeland Security. NSGP seeks to integrate the preparedness activities of nonprofit organizations that are at high risk of a terrorist attack with broader state and local preparedness efforts. It also serves to promote emergency preparedness coordination and collaboration activities between public and private community representatives as well as state and local government agencies.

If enacted, this legislation will ensure that the Department of Homeland Security provides grant funding to assist targeted organizations with the costs of acquiring and installing security equipment, security personnel, and security training for key personnel to prevent/protect against attacks.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Letter from Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson to Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator W. Craig Fugate (Aug. 29, 2016), and Letter from Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson to Federal Emergency Management Agency Interim Administrator Robert Fenton (March 3, 2017).

⁶ Securing American Non-Profit Organizations Against Terrorism Act of 2017, HR 1486, 115TH Cong. (2017). Agreed to by voice vote. January 9, 2018.

⁷ Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2018 (Pub. L. No. 115-141).