

Ranking Member Brian Higgins (D-NY) Opening Statement

“Federal Government Intelligence Sharing with State, Local, and Tribal Law Enforcement: An Assessment Ten Years After 9/11”

Tuesday, February 28, 2012

Information sharing is an integral part of our nation’s security. An environment in which information is shared is one where better decisions can be made, and ultimately in which people are safer.

This message is not new. It is something that has been on our radar for over the past 10 years. It is also something that the federal government has been working to get right.

Since September 11th, the federal government has developed many initiatives expanding Federal efforts at information sharing with state and local partners.

We now have information sharing partnerships that we did not have on September 12, 2001, such as Fusion Centers and the National Joint Terrorism Task Force.

Further, this administration has indicated that effective information sharing throughout the government is a key priority. Over the past three years, three executive orders have been issued to improve information sharing.

Although we have made improvements with information sharing, we must not become complacent.

We need specificity. We need the government to have a clear cut definition of the programs and activities that are most important to the homeland security mission.

Further, in this budgetary environment, we do not want to short change security. However, as we extend financial and human resources to these programs, their value should be defined.

Additionally, information sharing should have a tailored approach. State and local officers must get the assistance they need to be most effective to protecting the people in their own backyard

That means that when intelligence officers are deployed to jurisdictions, that they have an interest in knowing the jurisdiction and that jurisdiction’s sensitivities. That means that we must be cognizant of the entire threat. The threats that exist in the Western New York, may not be the same as those on the Southern Border.

Also, we need for the agencies as a whole, especially the DHS components, to be willing participants and provide the necessary support to assist state and locals. Unfortunately, in November 2011, the DHS Office of Inspector General found that there were improvements needed in this area. I look forward to hearing what the DHS has done to rectify this situation since the release of this report.

Further, as we partner with jurisdictions we must remember that state and local officers know their jurisdictions best. They also need to have a voice and should be heard. This is not a new message, but for some reason one we must repeat.

These are the challenges that we are here to explore today. I hope each of our witnesses will be forthcoming in your assessments of these and other challenges that lie ahead for the information sharing environment. Only by helping us fully understand the challenges ahead can we hope to work together to craft solutions to these problems.