

# **Ranking Member William Keating (D-MA) Opening Statement**

## **COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT, INVESTIGATIONS & MANAGEMENT**

### ***“U.S.-Caribbean Border: Open Road for Drug Traffickers and Terrorists ”***

9:00 a.m., Thursday, June 21, 2012

As the former District Attorney for Norfolk County in Massachusetts, I have witnessed firsthand the devastating effects of drug-related crimes and violence on entire families, communities, nations and for the purpose of this hearing, commonwealths, as well.

In Massachusetts, 1.7 people die per day from opiate-related overdoses.

And, with each new drug parcel crossing into our borders, hundreds more people will become addicted.

For this reason, it is important to understand that the drug trade has a global reach.

Often in the media, on this Committee, and even in the Administration, there is a heavy focus on our immediate borders to the north and of course, to the south.

The truth is that there is no distance too far or hurdle too high for drug traffickers.

While supply and demand for drugs remains steady, the ingenuity and wealth of smugglers increase and federal dollars to fight this phenomenon decrease.

Yet, whether you are in Bourne, Massachusetts; San Juan, Puerto Rico; Juarez, Mexico; or Praia, Cape Verde, the face of despair following the loss of a loved one to drug violence or addiction remains the same.

For this reason, I welcome this hearing's stray away from the usual association between drugs and the Southwest border.

The Caribbean is home to two U.S. territories: Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

This is not an issue affecting a foreign nation, it is instead, one that has significant consequences for the 4 million American citizens that live in Puerto Rico and the nearly 110,000 that live in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

This is an issue that requires a comprehensive strategy.

Yet, the homeland security resources, equipment and personnel that are deployed to those areas are not on par with other parts of the United States with less challenging circumstances.

It is often noted that the main point of entry for drugs into the U.S. is through the Central American corridor, not the Caribbean-Florida corridor; yet the resources dedicated to Miami, the entry point from the Caribbean, far outweigh what is deployed in Puerto Rico.

For example, there are currently twice as many ICE Homeland Security Investigations agents in Miami than Puerto Rico.

There are almost five times the number of CBP Office of Field Operations officers assigned to Miami than Puerto Rico.

And although the Coast Guard interdicted over 1,700 pounds of cocaine in Puerto Rico from January 2009 and August 2011 and none in Miami during that same timeframe, the Coast Guard Office in San Juan, has to rely on assets from Miami to reinforce their fleet.

Moreover, Miami has a population of 400,000 while Puerto Rico has a population of nearly 4 million.

Certainly, the efforts undertaken in Miami are laudable, but for comparison's sake, this disparity clearly shows that Puerto Rico lacks the federal attention warranted by its crime rate, population and drug trade.

On the commonwealth level, I am concerned about the allegations of widespread systemic corruption and abuse occurring in the Puerto Rico Police Department.

According to a scathing 143-page findings letter by the Department of Justice, it "is an agency in profound disrepair."

Furthermore, a report released by the ACLU on Tuesday, as a follow-up to the DOJ investigation indicated that "these abuses do not represent isolated incidents or aberrant behavior by a few rogue officers." Rather it is "pervasive and systemic, island-wide and ongoing."

Yet, federal agents, through numerous Caribbean-based task forces and interagency agreements, have to work in partnership with PRPD officers in matters affecting our homeland security.

The Governor of Puerto Rico has ultimate authority over the PRPD, is responsible for appointing a Superintendent to administer the PRPD, and approves appointments to senior positions in the PRPD, from Inspectors to Colonels, I am therefore interested in hearing from him on how he intends work with his Federal counterparts to ease some of the issues in the PRPD.

Finally, I understand that a focus on the drug trade in the Caribbean may be confusing for some, given the need for resources in our communities at home to fight the same problems. That being said, today's hearing and others like it that look into trade routes in other areas, like West Africa, are needed to adequately combat drug violence and addiction.

I thank the witnesses for their attendance and look forward to hearing from both panels on how to increase our efforts and better position the safety and security of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.