

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Building a Secure Community: How Can DHS Better Leverage State and Local Partnerships?***

July 12, 2012 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Border and Maritime Security subcommittee hearing entitled “Building a Secure Community: How Can DHS Better Leverage State and Local Partnerships?”

“Let me start by saying I strongly support the Administration’s decision to identify and remove aliens who may pose a threat to national security or public safety. However, I believe it is imperative that programs like Secure Communities be focused, first and foremost, on removing serious criminal offenders, given ICE’s limited enforcement resources.

The program must be administered to guard against racial profiling and protect community-police relations. In its September 2011 report, the Homeland Security Advisory Council (HSAC) Task Force on Secure Communities made important recommendations to improve the program.

I wholeheartedly agree with its recommendations that ICE develop good working relationships with participating states, cities, and communities; implement mechanisms to ensure the program prioritizes those who pose a risk to public safety or national security; and, most importantly, strengthen mechanisms to prevent civil rights and civil liberties violations.

In its response to the report, ICE has made or plans to implement several changes to the Secure Communities program to address the task force’s recommendations.

I look forward to hearing from Director Morton today about the status of these efforts and what additional changes we should expect. Unfortunately, some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle continue to describe ICE’s practical, risk-based approach to the removal of undocumented aliens, whether they be brought to ICE through Secure Communities or another program, as “administrative amnesty.”

As I have said before, unless and until Congress appropriates sufficient funds for ICE to apprehend and remove every undocumented alien in the country, we should support the agency’s efforts to focus its limited resources on removing those undocumented aliens who pose the greatest threat to our nation.

It is also worth reiterating that under the current Administration, ICE has removed more criminal aliens, and more aliens total, than under the Bush Administration or any other prior administration, Democratic or Republican.

With that, Madam Chairman, I would like to welcome Director Morton. I look forward to hearing from him and am certain he will provide the Members of this Subcommittee valuable insight into the complex issue of immigration enforcement. “

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FOR MORE INFORMATION: Please contact Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978