

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Bioterrorism: Assessing the Threat***

February 11, 2014 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Emergency Preparedness, Response and Communications subcommittee hearing entitled “Bioterrorism: Assessing the Threat”:

“I understand that Congressman Pascrell and Congressman King plan to reintroduce the WMD Prevention and Preparedness Act today. I commend both of them on their efforts to improve WMD preparedness, response, and recovery in a bipartisan manner.

Their bill has been approved by the Full Committee twice. With any luck, maybe the third time will be the charm, and this critical legislation will finally get due consideration by the Full House. Enactment of this measure will strengthen our Nation’s homeland security posture in very meaningful ways – particularly in the area of bio-defense.

Over the past 10 years, we have invested over \$60 billion in bio-security programs. Nevertheless, most of the assessments I have seen indicate that the United States is not where it needs to be with respect to preventing and responding to a large-scale biological attack. The legislation authored by Mr. Pascrell and Mr. King would begin the effort of building a robust bio-defense enterprise.

In addition, it would ensure that first responders have the committed and collaborative federal partner needed to address the unique issues of a potential WMD attack.

Importantly, the bill reauthorizes the Metropolitan Medical Response System (MMRS). This critical grant program has not been funded since 2011, and its authorization has lapsed. The MMRS reauthorization language included in this bill would provide grants to metropolitan areas to bolster medical surge capacity, strengthen capabilities, and improve biological response and decontamination activities.

State and local public health departments have been hit hard by budget cuts, and they need MMRS. I am committed to seeing the WMD bill become law, but I know there are obstacles in its path. As we work to resolve those issues, I hope that the legislation can be the spring board for discussion, and that it will keep the issue of biodefense and WMD on the front burner. I thank the witnesses for being here, and I look forward to their testimony.”

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