



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

Stakeholder Assessments of the Administration's National Preparedness Grant Program Proposal

April 29, 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 “Stakeholder Assessments of the Administration’s National Preparedness Grant Program Proposal”:

“I would like to express my sympathies to those affected by the tornadoes that have devastated communities across Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, and Mississippi. My thoughts are with them - particularly those in Tupelo, Mississippi, which is in my District.

I appreciate this Subcommittee’s effort to give stakeholders a voice in the debate surrounding the Administration’s grant consolidation proposal.

This Committee works diligently to consider the views of stakeholders as it drafts and reviews policy proposals. It is especially important that we do so when it is unclear whether the Administration effectively engaged with stakeholders. The preparedness grant consolidation proposal is the latest example.

The preparedness grant programs administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency serve a vital role in every Congressional District, enabling critical disaster response capabilities.

From the Urban Area Security Initiative and the State Homeland Security Program, to the Port Security Grant Program and the Transit Security Grant Program, we have seen first-hand the fundamental benefits these programs have provided.

Over the past ten years, we have invested over \$39 billion in these and other homeland security grant programs.

The capabilities and safeguards these programs have given to first responder capabilities cannot be understated.

When we go back to our Districts, we hear anecdotal stories about how Homeland Security Grant program funding supported a table-top exercise to test a local Emergency Operations Plan or to purchase technology that will help first responders do their jobs quicker, better, and safer.

In light of the recent one-year anniversary of the Boston Marathon Bombings, we cannot forget the outstanding performance and response displayed by the Boston and Watertown Police Departments.

In his testimony before this Committee in May 2013, former Boston Police Department Commissioner Ed Davis noted that the response to the bombings would not have been as comprehensive or successful without the planning, training, exercises and equipment supported by the Urban Area Security Initiative.

It is no surprise that communities across the country are proud of the preparedness capabilities that they were able to develop over the past ten years.

Thanks in large part to the targeted investments made possible by the Homeland Security Grant Program, more of our nation’s communities are able to rest assured that, in the unfortunate event of an emergency, they are prepared.

But now, despite the milestones we have been able to accomplish throughout the nation, the capabilities

we have so heavily invested in could end up being suspended or mothballed.

Once again, the Administration proposed the National Preparedness Grant Program (NPG).

This underfunded proposal would haphazardly consolidate 18 targeted homeland security grant programs into a single pot of money, forcing groups who currently benefit from discrete funding sources to compete against each other for the funds necessary to build and maintain preparedness capabilities.

Although I appreciate FEMA's effort to provide greater clarity to its vision for NPGP in its April 25, 2014 letter to Chairwoman Brooks and Ranking Member Payne, Jr., I am not convinced it made the case for consolidation.

As part of its rationale, FEMA asserts that this consolidation is necessary to ensure better coordination of investments at the regional, state, and local level and to avoid unnecessarily duplicative investments.

But it has yet to explain how the proposed grant overhaul would achieve that objective.

Moreover, as State and local governments struggle to maintain the capabilities they have achieved over the last decade, FEMA has not made the case for requesting only \$1.04 billion to fund NPGP.

Finally, it is not clear whether or how FEMA incorporated feedback from stakeholders as it drafted its proposal.

After two years of urging FEMA to engage in ongoing outreach and discussion with stakeholders, I was troubled to learn that this had not occurred to the degree we had hoped before the National Preparedness Grant Program proposal was resubmitted to Congress this year.

Accordingly, I cannot support the reform proposal until it is clear that capabilities the concerns of stakeholders have been adequately addressed and that the capabilities developed over the past decade will be maintained and improved."

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