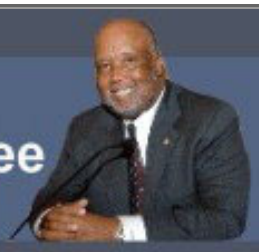
NEWS ALERT

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Homeland Security Committee

Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, Ranking Member



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

How Data Mining Threatens Student Privacy

June 25, 2014 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Cybersecurity, Infrastructure Protection, and Security Technologies subcommittee joint hearing entitled "How Data Mining Threatens Student Privacy":

"There is considerable controversy about how we treat the vast amounts of student data created in the education field. Education's large-scale data sets—what scientists refer to as "big data"—are troves of potential knowledge about our students. From education's "big data", teachers can learn instructional methods; textbook writers can adapt their content; and policy makers can make decisions on curriculum guidelines. However, the information technology involved in storing the big data is outpacing the infrastructure and the contractual agreements that school districts currently have in place. Educational data contains sensitive, personally identifiable information about our students. Parents are justifiably concerned about schools' use of their children's student data.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, or FERPA, was written and has been amended to protect the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education. FERPA gives parents certain rights with respect to access to their children's education records. While the Department of Homeland Security does identify Education as a sub-sector in the National Infrastructure Protection Plan, most of the planning and coordination between the two agencies exists because of physical security and emergency response planning needs in the event of natural or man-made disaster or terroristic events.

What we will hear today is testimony on the implications of the collection, storage and use of in-depth student data, as managed by local and state school systems, and the Department of Education. The Department of Homeland Security is considered the leader among civilian agencies in developing privacy-protective technologies and policies for handling personal data, and has initiated pilot programs for developing a federal department-wide capability to analyze the large sets of data that DHS agencies collect.

As part of this "big data" effort, DHS has brought together stakeholders to find ways to incorporate privacy protections in the management of big-data strictly in the dot gov arena. And DHS has been involved in federal research efforts as part of the Networking and Information Technology Research and Development program, on data privacy technologies in general, efforts promoted by the White House Office of Science and Technology.

It is possible that the Department's leadership role in the Federal government's cyber R&D efforts can help provide advanced IT capabilities for the education sector, and other sectors concerned with privacy. There is a huge body of study already underway by academia, educational advocacy, and industry groups to develop and enable a common language for security and privacy policies tailored to students and parents, as well as to organizations and entities that underpin the education environment.

This could potentially help school systems, and parents, that are struggling with contractual or technological or procedural privacy concerns associated with educational 'big-data'. Like with all critical infrastructure networks, we must find a way to work together with schools, nonprofits, and industry to enable parents and educators to make informed decisions and maximize the opportunities that come with rapidly advancing technology, without comprising our students and learners' privacy and safety."

# # #

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

Committee on Homeland Security
H2-117, Ford House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515
Phone: (202) 226-2616 | Fax: (202) 226-4499
http://chsdemocrats.house.gov