

Ranking Member Brian Higgins Opening Statement

“Addressing Remaining Gaps in Federal, State, and Local Information Sharing”

Thursday, February 26, 2015

Information sharing is an integral part of our nation’s security. It has been both said and proven time and time again: information sharing leads to better and more informed decision making and ultimately leads to a safer environment for everyone.

The idea of information sharing between Federal, state, local law enforcement has been engrained in our homeland security policies since September 11, 2001. Since that date, the Federal government has developed many initiatives expanding efforts at information sharing with state and local partners.

And while we now have many more partnerships, such as Fusion Centers and the National Joint Terrorism Task Force, our work in this area is not complete. The ultimate goal of intelligence is to provide accurate analysis in a timely manner. Complacency is unacceptable.

There must be a balance that eliminates unnecessary redundancy while maintaining the competitive environment for sharing information. That is the challenge for law enforcement officials. Congress must do our part as well. As we sit here today, none of us know for sure what will happen with DHS funding within the next hour or tomorrow. That type of uncertainty will trickle down and impact all of the issues we have gathered to discuss today.

Information sharing should also be tailored, when practicable, to ensure that each law enforcement entity is getting the best and most useful information. The true value of information sharing will never be realized if state and locals cannot respond and protect their own communities. Intelligence officers and analysts must integrate themselves into the jurisdictions and communities they are assigned in order to know and understand geographical and cultural sensitivities.

Also, we need the agencies as a whole, especially the DHS components, to be willing participants and provide the necessary support to assist state and locals. So while this topic is not new, it is an issue that we cannot afford to ignore. I recognize the position our witnesses are put in today, essentially being asked to critique an agency that is their partner and funding source, but I want to assure you that this type of open dialogue is beneficial to all parties involved.

Once Congress can understand the challenges you face, we can work together to craft effective solutions.