

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Donald M. Payne, Jr.

Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications

Markup

May 14, 2015

Before I begin, I would like to send my thoughts and condolences to those who were injured or lost loved-ones in Tuesday night's train derailment outside Philadelphia.

I also want to thank the police, firefighters, EMS personnel who bravely responded to the scene, as well as the doctors and nurses who treated the injured.

Given that our mission in this Subcommittee is to help first responders do their jobs better and safer so they can help more people more effectively, it is fitting that we are here today to consider three measures that are targeted at helping emergency responders.

Before I discuss these measures, I want to thank Chairman McSally for continuing the Subcommittee's tradition of bipartisanship.

Tuesday's tragedy serves as an important reminder that equipping our first responders with the tools they need to do their jobs is not a Democrat or Republican priority, but rather it is an American priority.

Accordingly, I am pleased to be a cosponsor of H.R. 2200, the *CBRN Intelligence and Information Sharing Act of 2015*, which was introduced by Chairman McSally.

This legislation seeks to sharpen the focus of the Office of Intelligence and Analysis' activities as they relate to chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear threats so that State and local officials and emergency responders are provided timely and actionable threat information.

As we have heard time and time again from witnesses before this Subcommittee, complete situational awareness is critical to any successful emergency response.

I appreciate Chairman McSally's efforts to improve CBRN threat-related intelligence and information sharing, and look forward to continuing to work with her to advance H.R. 2200 as it moves forward.

I am also pleased that the Subcommittee is considering H.R. 1300, the *First Responder Anthrax Preparedness Act*, which was introduced by Representative Peter King and my New Jersey delegation colleague, Representative Bill Pascrell.

Both Mr. Pascrell and Mr. King have been strong leaders in pushing Congress and the Administration to do more to protect against - and ensure that we are prepared to respond to - an attack using a Weapon of Mass Destruction.

H.R. 1300 is much-needed legislation that seeks to protect emergency responders who are charged with responding to an anthrax attack.

We owe it to these brave men and women to provide a measure of security that they can rush to the scene without fear of becoming sick themselves.

This legislation has received significant support from the first responder community, and I am pleased that it is moving forward.

Finally, I want thank Subcommittee Chairman McSally for cosponsoring H.R. 2206, *the Statewide Interoperable Communications Enhancement Act* or the *SWIC Act*, and including the bill in today's mark-up.

After the 9/11 attacks, and again after Hurricane Katrina, interoperable communications were identified as one of the most significant challenges to an effective response.

Interestingly, in the years since Hurricane Katrina, the progress that has been made on achieving interoperability across the nation is largely attributed to improvements in governance, not technology gains.

Last Congress, the Subcommittee received testimony from Mark Grubb, a national leader on interoperability where he explained that "Interoperability requires much more than just equipment – it's really about people in disparate agencies and jurisdictions including each other in their planning processes."

That's where Statewide Interoperability Coordinators, or SWICs, come in.

SWICs have been credited as helping State and local governments better coordinate communications technology investments and develop essential plans, governance structures, and other critical planning documents.

Over the last several years, we have seen SWICs efforts yield real results.

Unfortunately, the elimination of the Interoperable Emergency Communications Grant Program, reduced Federal grant funds, and stretched State budgets have resulted in fewer resources for SWICs and the important activities they carry out.

The *SWIC Act* seeks to preserve the important advancements in interoperable communications made by SWICs and previous Homeland Security Grant Program investments by requiring States to certify that they will sustain the interoperability gains already achieved before seeking new grant funding.

I would be remiss if I did not also thank Full Committee Chairman McCaul and Ranking Member Thompson for their support of my legislation.

I urge my colleagues to support all of the measures under consideration today, and I congratulate the Chair on the Subcommittee's first mark-up.