

# **Opening Statement of Ranking Member Donald Payne Jr. (D-NJ)**

## **Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications**

### **“State of Emergency: The Disaster of Cutting Preparedness Grants”**

**Tuesday, March 15, 2016**

I represent the 10<sup>th</sup> Congressional District of New Jersey. It is home to Newark Liberty International Airport, the New Jersey Transit Authority, the Port Newark-Elizabeth Marine Terminal, and a dense area of industrial facilities that the *New York Times* has coined “the most dangerous two miles in America.”

Over 100 potential terrorist targets are interspersed between homes and commuter corridors along that stretch. Those targets, coupled with its proximity to New York City, make the Newark-Jersey City metropolitan area regularly ranked among the most high-risk urban areas in the country.

Although it is a somewhat dubious distinction, it has brought with it critical Federal funding. From the Urban Area Security Initiative to Port and Transit Security Grants, Federal funding has helped Northern New Jersey improve preparedness planning, achieve interoperable communications capabilities, and harden infrastructure targets.

Most importantly, Federal funding has supported important multi-jurisdiction exercises that challenge existing response capabilities so we can make them stronger. These “human capital” investments - planning, training, and exercises – cannot be one-off investments.

Rather, they must be repeated over time, both to train new responders and to help seasoned responders know how to take on emerging threats. Like many of my colleagues on this panel, I was very troubled by the Administration’s proposal to slash important homeland security grants for Fiscal Year 2017.

In the three-and-a-half years I have served as this Subcommittee’s Ranking Member, I have seen the domestic threat environment evolve as our first responders are on the front lines. I understand that the Administration proposed to slash Federal homeland security grant funds to comply with budget caps and I take issue with that.

We cannot afford to balance the budget on the backs of our first responders. Instead, Federal first responder funding should be robust and predictable, so that our State and local governments can effectively plan for future investments. I am sure that the testimony we hear today will help us build the case to appropriators that strong homeland security grant funding should continue. Together, we can fight these cuts and win.

Additionally, I will be interested in learning the witnesses’ thoughts on the new grants to Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) and the proposed Regional Competitive Grant Program. The Department has failed to provide Congress much detail on either program, and I will be interested to learn if DHS has conducted any outreach to the stakeholder community about them.

Particularly with respect to CVE grants, I am interested in hearing the witnesses’ thoughts on what can be done to guard against certain populations being targeting or profiled. In the past, mosques in my Congressional district were the subject of surveillance by an out-of-state law enforcement agency.

Although the NYPD program was subsequently disbanded, it showed us firsthand the dangers of profiling and I want to be sure that precautions to avoid such outcomes are taken as we make new money available for CVE.