



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)**

***Examining the Department of Homeland Security's Efforts to Counter Weapons of Mass Destruction***

**Emergency Preparedness, Response & Communications Subcommittee**

**December 7, 2017**

On October 6, 2017, then-Acting Homeland Security Secretary Elaine Duke notified the Committee that DHS was utilizing its authority under Section 872 of the Homeland Security Act of 2002 to establish the Office of Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction (CWMD). The Office was officially stood up earlier this week.

This is not the first time the Department has used its Section 872 authority to execute a reorganization without seeking Congressional authorization, nor is it the first time that the Department has sought to consolidate its activities related to countering chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) threats – but I have concerns about both.

Since its inception, DHS has undergone several disruptive reorganizations – many without Congressional authorization and some with mixed results. In July 2005, for example, Secretary Chertoff announced sweeping plans to realign DHS to improve mission performance.

Part of Secretary Chertoff's proposal shifted preparedness functions from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to DHS headquarters with such disastrous consequences that Congress eventually restored them to FEMA. I raise this cautionary tale as a reminder that even the most well-intentioned reorganizations can have unintended consequences.

In my experience, the rigorous vetting inherent in the authorization process can help Congress understand the resources and authorities the Department needs from the outset and root out or mitigate potential challenges associated with reorganizations.

The authorization process can also clarify what problems a reorganization aims to resolve and how a realignment can improve mission capability.

Toward that end, when this Committee assessed DHS' proposal to establish a Chemical, Biological, Nuclear, Radiological, and Explosives (CBRNE) Defense Office

last Congress, I never got a satisfying answer to two fundamental questions I asked: What problems will this reorganization solve? How will the proposed reorganization solve the problems?

Without answers to these questions, it is impossible for the agency to justify potential disruptions to the workforce, direct resources appropriately, or measure results.

I hope the witnesses here today have better answers for me, particularly since DHS acted unilaterally and the reorganization has already begun. The Department of Homeland Security plays an important role in the CBRNE defense space, and we cannot afford for a misguided, poorly executed reorganization to undermine its ability to carry out its mission.

Last Congress, I asked the Government Accountability Office to review the CBRNE reorganization proposal the Department submitted to Congress in 2015.

Although we are here today to review a reorganization that is already under way, there are recommendations and best practices GAO identified in its 2016 report that remain relevant.

Moreover, I will be interested to understand why the Department executed its section 872 authority prior to fully addressing all of the recommendations GAO made.

Moving forward, Committee Democrats are committed to ensuring that DHS effectively carries out its mission related to weapons of mass destruction threats, and that any Departmental reorganization focuses on capability building and preserving a talented workforce.

# # #

Media contact: Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978

