<u>Written Testimony for Homeland Security Subcommittee</u>

Hon. Brad Schneider, Illinois's Tenth Congressional District

For March 1, 2017

Mr. Chairman, Ms. Ranking Member, and distinguished colleagues of the Subcommittee, thank you this opportunity to speak before the Committee. I am here today to request robust funding for the Department of Homeland Security for two programs of particular importance to the residents of my district and our country.

The United States has always been a nation of immigrants and a shining beacon of hope for those fleeing oppression and seeking a better life. We must ensure our country remains open and welcoming to refugees so the next generation of Americans seeking refuge from war, violence, and oppression may find home here.

I strenuously oppose President Trump's discriminatory executive order to bar entry of all refugees which I believe does nothing to target the root causes of terrorism, does not make our country safer, and undermines the very values that define our nation.

The Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) plays an important role by processing applications for those seeking entry into the United States as asylum seekers, refugees, or through other U.S. humanitarian programs. This service works alongside other important federal initiatives, including the Department of Health and Human Service's Refugee and Entrant Assistance account (REA), the Department of State's Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) and Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance accounts (ERMA), and the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) International Disaster Assistance (IDA) account to help refugees domestically and overseas.

Currently, USCIS faces lengthy backlogs and delays when processing applications. Media outlets reported that in June 2016, the backlog reached a record-breaking total of more than 495,000 cases.

The United States must have the necessary resources to process the number of people seeking refugee or asylum status in our country. I urge this Committee to work with USCIS to determine whether additional funding could reduce this backlog and both expedite and increase the accuracy of our application and screening process.

While no system is perfect, the United States has a vigorous vetting process for potential entrants. I am committed to working to improve our screening procedures, however I strongly disagree with the need to "pause" processing and admittance of refugees while we do so.

I also urge the Committee to continue to fund the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NSGP) within the Department of Homeland Security.

The NSGP was created so at-risk nonprofit organizations that serve as community centers have the resources needed to protect themselves against potential extremist threats. The funds may be used for important capital improvements to upgrade security measures. Examples include installing fencing, bollards, lighting, video surveillance, metal detectors, access controls, improvements to blast-proof windows and doors, and cyber-security enhancements.

Underscoring the need for this program is the troubling nationwide rise of anti-Semitic incidents in 2017, including dozens of bomb threats against Jewish Community Centers and the severe vandalism of two Jewish cemeteries. In total, there have been more than 100 threats against Jewish organizations in 81 sites in 33 states since the beginning of the year.

This threat is exacerbated by the efforts of ISIL and extremist organizations to inspire and motivate homegrown violent extremism within the United States.

The NSGP allows important community centers to take the necessary steps to both deter and protect themselves from hate-motivated violence.

Together, the USCIS and NSGP represent the United States' dual commitment to remaining a welcoming refuge for those fleeing violence and a secure home for all of our diverse communities. I urge the Committee to prioritize funding for these two critical program for fiscal year 2018.