

OFFICIAL TESTIMONY
OF
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FOR A HEARING ON

“Countering Violent Extremism, Terrorism, and Antisemitic Threats in New Jersey”

BEFORE THE
United States House of Representatives
House Committee on Homeland Security

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Chairman Thompson and Ranking Member Katko, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you and the House Committee on Homeland Security. My remarks today will largely center around New Jersey's efforts to help ensure the security of our residents, communities, visitors, and institutions, especially our work to counter violent extremism, terrorism, and bias-motivated crimes. The New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness leads and coordinates the State's counterterrorism, cybersecurity, and resiliency efforts. While an evolving threat landscape has presented New Jersey with a diverse set of security challenges, we work in coordination with federal, State, and local law enforcement partners to address our shared domestic security. We recognize the nature of the work requires constant improvement, the ongoing development of strategies, and continued expansion of current capabilities to help prevent, thwart, and mitigate threats at all levels.

It is no secret that we have seen a recent uptick in domestic violent extremist activity around the country. New Jersey's analytical capabilities have concentrated on domestic extremism and the threat it presents. In 2020, we were one of the first states in the nation to sharpen its focus on extreme ideologies that incite individuals to take violent action. Our most recent threat assessment designated homegrown violent extremists and white racially motivated extremists as high-level threats and forecasted that foreign terrorist organizations will continue to seek opportunities to inspire extremists to conduct attacks in the Homeland and abroad.

Over the last decade, certain extremists have adopted the belief systems of multiple domestic extremists and foreign terrorist organizations and tailored those belief systems to develop and ultimately form unique, radical worldviews that advance their own violent goals. These extremists use this ideological convergence for guidance or to justify violence against shared targets. They also employ common tactics, such as attack methods, recruitment strategies, and propaganda distribution. Their aversion for institutions and beliefs are often in close alignment, with Western government democracies consistently among their shared common enemies. These elements combined, coupled with the availability of various social media platforms, create unique security challenges for law enforcement.

Racially motivated extremists remain committed to spreading antisemitic rhetoric online, with a focus on alternative social media and encrypted messaging platforms. Nationwide, supporters of the white racially motivated extremist ideology have demonstrated their willingness and capability to coordinate and network globally, as well as to direct and inspire sympathizers online. In New Jersey, to spread their ideology and recruit new members, white racially motivated extremists' primary tactic is mostly through the distribution of propaganda. Additionally, white racially motivated extremists may attempt to establish stronger ties in the state, while stockpiling weapons and tactical equipment. Black racially motivated extremists may engage in low-level criminal activities, demonize law enforcement, and spread antisemitic conspiracies, while lone offenders may conduct isolated attacks. Violent lone offenders with various motivations have targeted law enforcement in opportunistic or ambush incidents, leading to several fatal attacks around the nation, including here in New Jersey.

In December 2019, two shooters killed a total of four people and injured three others in two separate incidents in Jersey City, New Jersey, when they targeted a kosher grocery store, shortly after killing Jersey City Police Detective Joseph Seals at a nearby cemetery. The shooters, who

had a fringe affiliation with Black racially motivated extremist ideology, espoused antisemitic and anti-law enforcement views prior to the attack, according to authorities. Law enforcement responded and both assailants were neutralized following a standoff at the grocery store. This past April, an incident unfolded in and around Lakewood, New Jersey, when a lone offender conducted several violent attacks on members of the Orthodox Jewish community. Authorities charged the perpetrator with willfully causing bodily injury to four victims and of those, attempting to kill and cause injuries with dangerous weapons to three. While the incident in Lakewood is still an ongoing investigation, the attacker allegedly targeted these individuals solely on the basis of their culture and religion. Both occurrences are examples of individuals, driven by hate and bias, singling out and terrorizing a community.

Although we know we cannot stop every attack, there are steps we can take to mitigate the risks. We can build resiliency, we can educate the public, we can promote information sharing among our partners and we can identify and forewarn of potential threats to the best of our ability. With the support of our State's administration and leadership, we are proud of our work and continue to embrace a whole-of-community approach to security. OHSP's Interfaith Advisory Council continues to be a national model for faith-based community engagement. With a 4,000-person membership base, the IAC has been able to successfully foster open dialogue and promote honest conversations, charting a collaborative and all-inclusive approach to security. Members are regularly updated on best practices, grant opportunities, and free training programs, along with resources and information that will assist them in identifying vulnerabilities and closing any security gaps. OHSP works with homeland security and law enforcement partners by sharing information, facilitating their connection with faith-based community leaders and taking all the necessary actions against any form of targeted violence and terrorism.

Through our Grants Bureau, OHSP serves as the State Administrative Agency to eligible nonprofit organizations seeking homeland security funding provided by both the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the State of New Jersey. Over the past two years, our agency has administered more than \$32 million in federal Nonprofit Security Grant Program funding to those organizations demonstrating a high risk for a terrorist attack. Additionally, in January, Governor Phil Murphy signed legislation establishing the New Jersey Nonprofit Security Grant Program. Introduced as a pilot program, this funding has proven to be an important State resource to supplement available federal security grants. Since 2019, OHSP has administered \$6.9 million through this competitive and successful program.

As the public continues to be our first line of defense in the fight against terrorism, OHSP has partnered with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security on the "If You See Something, Say Something®" campaign, amplifying its message throughout New Jersey. Furthermore, OHSP works closely with the New Jersey Division of Criminal Justice, as well as county and local partners, to review bias incident reports, which are assessed to determine if they meet the threshold for submission to the State's Suspicious Activity Reporting System. Conversely, OHSP shares all suspicious activity information and a weekly report outlining suspicious activity that may have a potential bias motivation with the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General and Division of Criminal Justice. This ensures that the proper authorities thoroughly review, vet, and investigate all incidents.

Two new security initiatives will also contribute to the State's efforts to counter violent extremism. This year, OHSP and selected partner agency personnel participated in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's four-day training, the "National Threat Evaluation and Reporting Master Trainer Program." The training certifies homeland security professionals in behavioral threat assessment techniques and best practices. This will enable our Master Trainers to empower communities to identify, investigate, assess, and manage potential threats of targeted violence regardless of motive. Additionally, OHSP, along with our partners, is collaborating on a Behavioral Threat Assessment Management Team. The goal of this multidisciplinary, multiagency initiative is to deter violent extremists from radicalizing, inspiring, or recruiting individuals and to stop the mobilization towards violence. The New Jersey team consists of the FBI, OHSP, New Jersey's Department of Education, State Police, Office of the Attorney General, Division of Mental Health, Department of Human Services, and the Urban Areas Security Initiative. A portion of OHSP's role in this initiative is utilizing our Suspicious Activity Reporting System to help identify individuals that may be exhibiting certain risk factors.

OHSP aims to utilize these different initiatives to better understand and combat the evolving threat landscape. Our State, and the nation as a whole, has witnessed substantial change in recent years, and the threats that come from violent extremism and terrorism are no exception. This emphasizes the continued need for resiliency, and OHSP's mission has never been more important as we continue to meet these security challenges in the areas of counterterrorism, cybersecurity, and preparedness. To counter these evolving threats, OHSP and its staff have dedicated themselves to responding in kind with evolving strategies, such as robust intelligence and information sharing, preparedness initiatives, amplified public awareness campaigns, and joint investigative operations through interagency partnerships. This last component in particular, further stresses that our mission is not a solo effort, as continued collaboration with our partners at the local, county, State, and federal levels has been vital to meeting these security challenges, and we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge that we are stronger working together than alone.

Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Katko, and distinguished members of the Committee, I thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.

I look forward to your questions and yield back to the Chairman.