



TESTIMONY OF

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Introduction:

Good morning, Chairman Green, Ranking Member Thompson, and the distinguished members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS or the Department) role, responsibilities, and ongoing efforts in the Arctic.

Strategic competitors, allies, and likeminded partners increasingly prioritize the Arctic, contending for military, economic, and diplomatic advantages and influence in a region that is uniquely important due to its potential for resource development, waterway access, and global governance concerns. And yet, the Arctic is home to Indigenous Peoples and is a critical space for international collaboration, a region where the United States and our competitors could work together in scientific research and public safety efforts. As an Arctic nation, it is vital the United States protect and safeguard the Arctic for the benefit of all nations.

At DHS, we view Arctic security as homeland security and we are dedicated to safeguarding this space against all threats, including those posed by nation states. DHS personnel work diligently, every day in the Arctic, providing critical physical presence in this remote part of the world and U.S. homeland. We also leverage our partnerships with allies to exponentially expand the impact of our efforts. We have found that by working closely with key partners like Alaska Natives and state and local governments, we can do more together than we could accomplish alone. DHS will strategically use these partnerships and other tools as we face future threats from the great power competition playing out in the Arctic.

As I will discuss in more depth, DHS relies on expertise from across its operational Component agencies to safeguard the homeland. The Department – in concert with partners – plays a critical role to protect the Arctic from all hazards, ranging from environmental disasters to adversarial threats. Notably, the Department relies upon Component agency expertise and experience in law enforcement, civilian defense and response, and region-specific technologies to advance Arctic security.

On-Going Administration Work:

As a key leader in enacting U.S. policy throughout the Arctic, DHS has been a major contributor to developing the Administration's Arctic agenda. The Department wholeheartedly supports the President's policy goals to pursue an Arctic region that is peaceful, stable, prosperous, and cooperative, as articulated in the National Security Strategy.

In October of last year, the Administration published the National Strategy for the Arctic Region. This strategy establishes an affirmative U.S. agenda for the next decade. The Department's input was critical in shaping this strategy's perspective on security and in advocating for a holistic approach that includes homeland security concerns. The Department was also a key leader and contributor to the Implementation Plan, published last month, for this National Strategy. The Department ensured that the Implementation Plan integrated homeland security equities throughout the four pillars to advance U.S. security interests, mitigate climate change impacts

and protect the environment, develop economic interests, and advance international cooperation and governance. Specifically, my team co-led, with the Department of Defense, the effort to develop the Implementation Plan's security pillar. Due in part to DHS leadership and contributions, the Administration's National Strategy and Implementation Plan both prioritize U.S. physical presence in the region, promote sustainable economic development, protect the Arctic ecosystem, and safeguard Arctic communities from all hazards – especially those hazards posed by our competitors.

The Department is a crucial leader in the Administration's interagency work to guide and coordinate Federal Arctic policies. My office is a member of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy's Arctic Executive Steering Committee, and we co-chair that committee's Bering Task Force, alongside the Department of the Interior and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. We work closely with our interagency partners to protect this area that is, first and foremost, critical to the livelihoods of coastal communities including many Tribes. In years to come, this area will continue to grow in geostrategic importance for the United States and other nations because of its abundant natural resources, shipping routes, fisheries, and other future development opportunities.

Accomplishments and Commitments Across the DHS Enterprise:

DHS achieved several accomplishments in recent years and is deeply committed to our whole-of-DHS and whole-of-government work. The Department's resources across the enterprise support multiple lines of effort, including: Tribal partnerships, law enforcement, civilian defense and preparedness, and innovation in Arctic technology. I would like to briefly describe our efforts and accomplishments for these commitments.

Tribal Partnerships

Developing local partnerships and cultivating local security capacity are crucial to enhance regional security and resilience. When the Department partners with communities and local governments on the ground and across our waters, we help build local resilience and capacity to all hazards. Under the Biden Administration, the Department has strengthened one of our most critical partnerships in the Arctic – our relationship with Alaska Natives. On September 7, 2022, the Department established our first-ever Tribal Homeland Security Advisory Council that includes two representatives from Tribes from Alaska, among the 15 representatives of Tribes nationwide. Earlier this year, my office hosted our first-ever Tribal consultation sessions in-person in Alaska to understand the needs and concerns of Alaska Natives as we partner together in securing the region. DHS's Component agencies also routinely host Tribal consultations, listening sessions, training events, and other forums to strengthen our partnerships with these important stakeholders.

We are committed to expanding and deepening our relationships with Tribal leaders and Alaska Native communities and value the roles they play in our homeland security mission.

Law Enforcement

As an Arctic sovereign nation, the United States' responsibilities are to protect our Arctic territory and interests throughout Alaska and ensure the rule of law across the region. The gravity of this role is of paramount importance to the Department. We are dedicated to protecting Alaska's 15 ports of entry; 33,904 miles of maritime border; 1,538 miles of land border; and 665,400 square miles of land. The U.S. Coast Guard is the lead DHS agency for protecting Arctic waters and coasts. The Department leverages its full range of expertise and authorities to protect communities throughout Alaska, relying upon multiple Components, including U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Homeland Security Investigations, and the Transportation Security Administration.

Promoting lawful trade, travel, and economic security are key roles for the Department. Our employees enable safe travel through Alaskan land and maritime ports. The Ted Stevens International Airport in Anchorage is a key component of global trade. The airport is the world's fourth largest for cargo throughput and second only to Memphis, Tennessee, in the United States. At this airport, DHS personnel work to protect Americans and our global trade partners against criminal and state-sponsored efforts to smuggle dangerous goods, such as illicit narcotics, and automatic weapon converters and silencers.

The Department's law enforcement officers in Alaska act as a force multiplier in the region. Given the national security threats posed by the People's Republic of China and Russia to the Arctic region, these enforcement efforts also support our national security priorities. Department law enforcement personnel will often coordinate with state, local, and Tribal authorities to identify, assess, and minimize the risk posed by foreign adversaries. A notable example is the coordinated Department response when two Russian nationals fled their government's military reservist draft last year. These Russian nationals claimed political asylum in a remote Alaskan island in the Bering Sea. Because of the strong partnerships among Tribal, state, and local entities, CBP worked with the Coast Guard and local law enforcement to respond in an extremely remote area of Alaska.

Civilian Defense and Preparedness

The Department's role in civilian defense and preparedness is unique, given the operational challenges of the Arctic. These challenges require proactive planning to enable communities to prepare, withstand, and recover from a range of potential hazards, both natural and man-made. In the coming years, planning will become even more critical as natural hazards are expanded by climate change and as regional competition from threat actors increasingly threaten our Arctic infrastructure. The Department engages with diverse partners, from local ports to academia, to identify and provide resources needed to enhance critical infrastructure security and resilience, and to identify and minimize damage from anticipated future events.

Given the harsh conditions of the Arctic, enabling critical infrastructure security and resilience is a "must" for Alaskan communities. Across the U.S. Government, we are working to help local communities address threats to infrastructure from climate change. At DHS, we are focusing on partnering with Alaskan Tribes to improve the cybersecurity of local infrastructure. To help

support our partners respond to a wide range of emerging cyber threats, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) announced in September 2023 the \$18.2-million Tribal Cybersecurity Grant Program. This program will distribute funding and a framework to leverage CISA's tools, expertise, and technical assistance to secure tribal cyber networks and infrastructure against attacks.

When disasters strike, the Department is ready to help communities in need. In the fall of 2022, the historic Typhoon Merbok hit 1,000 miles of Alaskan coast, and DHS immediately took action. The U.S. Coast Guard coordinated the regional response with numerous federal, Tribal, state, and local entities. Coast Guard teams deployed to remote villages to assess the damage to ports and fuel storage facilities and partnered with local residents and companies to remove oil debris and conduct clean-up operations. Following President Biden's Major Disaster Declaration, FEMA responded with more than \$8 million in aid for Alaskans. DHS is vigilant and stands ready to help Americans in any crisis across the homeland.

Innovating for Arctic Technology

Meeting the increasing and evolving challenges in the Arctic requires that the U.S. Government invest in and develop technologies for this unique environment. The Department's Science and Technology Directorate is creating a new Center of Excellence for Homeland Security in the Arctic to conduct research and develop new tools and technologies to enhance DHS situational awareness, improve communities' resilience, expand collaboration across the Arctic-homeland security mission space, and provide key training opportunities for the next generation of Arctic homeland security professionals. This investment in a 10-year partnership and up to \$45 million in funding will enable us to harness the intellectual power of cutting-edge U.S. research and apply it to the complex issues facing the Department – specific to the Arctic.

DHS Next Steps:

Looking to the future, the Department will innovate and adapt to meet the evolving challenges throughout the Arctic. We will continue building on our successes and partnerships, expanding and augmenting our work to advance Arctic home security and implement our nation's Arctic strategy. I am proud to announce that the Department plans to release our 2024 DHS Arctic Action Plan early next year, in line with the Administration's goals for the Arctic. The Plan will include specific milestones for both DHS operational and headquarters Components. The Plan will move the Department through concrete actions toward adapting and achieving our evolving homeland security priorities.

Conclusion:

Thank you for your time and attention today as I have described, on behalf of the Department, our approach to advancing Arctic homeland security. The Department commits to continued focus and action to fulfill our homeland security mission through physical presence and strong local partnerships. By strengthening community resilience and preparedness throughout the region alongside key partners, we multiply the impact of our efforts. We will help protect the

Arctic against all threats, including those posed by nation-state competitors, and meet the complex challenges our nation faces in the region. I look forward to your questions.