



NATIONAL SHERIFFS' ASSOCIATION

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Testimony of Jonathan F. Thompson before the U.S. House Homeland Security Committee, Task Force on Enhancing Security for Special Events.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss proactive measures to safeguard mass events across the United States. As the nation prepares to host unprecedented gatherings over the next three years — including 2026 FIFA World Cup matches, the 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, and an expanding national calendar of large music festivals — our security posture must evolve to anticipate and counter emerging threats.

My testimony focuses on five areas: (1) drug-facilitated crime and public safety, (2) biometric and facial recognition systems, (3) digital anti-human trafficking tools, (4) drone and counter-UAS operations, and (5) specialized training for local law enforcement and event personnel.

I. Drug-Facilitated Crime and Public Safety Risks

Mass gatherings create ideal environments for exploitation through drug misuse, particularly substances such as ketamine, gamma hydroxybutyrate (GHB), and emerging synthetic analogs, which can be colorless, tasteless, and fast-acting. These characteristics make them tools for sexual assault and robbery in dense, high-energy venues where early symptoms are difficult to distinguish from intoxication or fatigue.

At events like international soccer matches, Olympic celebrations, and festivals such as Coachella, Lollapalooza, and Electric Daisy Carnival, crowd dynamics can delay detection and reporting. To mitigate these risks, event security planning should incorporate:

- Field testing kits and portable spectrometers at checkpoints and backstage areas to detect ketamine, GHB, and similar agents in drinks or on surfaces.
- Public education campaigns, including signage and mobile alerts, warning about drink-spiking risks and directing attendees to on-site medical and reporting stations.
- Interdisciplinary response teams where medical personnel and law enforcement are trained together to recognize symptoms, preserve evidence, and support survivors.

These actions would shorten response times and improve case outcomes for drug-facilitated assaults at large events.

II. Advancing Facial Recognition and Biometric Systems

Upcoming FIFA matches, the Los Angeles Olympics, and large-scale fan zones will draw millions of spectators, dignitaries, and workers into dense urban areas, making identity management and perimeter control paramount. Facial recognition and AI-enabled video analytics can help identify persons of interest, detect restricted-area breaches, and verify credentials, but deployment must be consistent with constitutional protections and privacy safeguards.

Policy recommendations include:

- Creating and maintaining a DHS-approved list of biometric systems that meet accuracy, demographic fairness, and cybersecurity standards suitable for dynamic mass-event environments.
- Ensuring secure, role-based integration of facial recognition alerts with DHS fusion centers and FBI databases, limited to specific, event-related objectives.
- Mandating strict data minimization, including short, predefined retention windows and independent audit logs, so data are deleted after the operational need ends.

These measures would enhance situational awareness at stadiums and fan zones while preserving public trust.

III. Digital Anti-Human Trafficking Tools

International events and large music festivals can increase vulnerability to sex and labor trafficking, as traffickers exploit transient workforces, informal lodging, and large anonymous crowds. Federal campaigns and task forces already provide training and awareness tools to help law enforcement and first responders recognize trafficking indicators and respond appropriately, and similar approaches can be embedded into mass-event planning.

Key strategies are:

- Deploying AI-driven tools to analyze online advertising, payment patterns, and communications that may indicate trafficking activity in host cities before and during events.
- Installing multilingual digital kiosks and secure mobile portals at venues, transportation hubs, and fan zones so victims or witnesses can seek help anonymously and be quickly connected with trained responders.
- Enhancing secure data-sharing and evidence management among federal agencies and local task forces, using modern, auditable systems that protect privacy while maintaining chain of custody.

Applying these tools to World Cup host cities, Olympic venues, and festival locations would strengthen efforts to identify victims and disrupt trafficking networks linked to large events.

IV. Drone Security and Counter-UAS Operations

Unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) have become integral for aerial broadcasting, crowd monitoring, and logistics, but unauthorized drones pose risks ranging from airborne hazards to hostile surveillance and potential weaponization. Security planners for the 2026 World Cup and 2028 Olympics are already emphasizing the need to expand counter-UAS authority and capabilities for state and local partners under federal oversight.

To address this threat, Congress and DHS should:

- Support use of flexible temporary flight restrictions and geo-fenced airspace around stadiums, fan festivals, and training facilities, coordinated with the FAA and local authorities.

- Invest in layered detection systems combining radio-frequency sensing, radar, and optical tracking to distinguish authorized broadcast or safety drones from unauthorized incursions.
 - Expand counter-UAS training and technical assistance for qualified state and local law enforcement, under a federal legal framework that protects lawful aviation and communications systems.
- These steps will help prevent malicious or careless drone activity from disrupting high-profile matches, ceremonies, and outdoor concerts.

V. Strengthening Local Training and Coordination

Technology alone cannot secure mass events without trained personnel who can interpret data and act quickly. Security preparations for the World Cup and Olympics already involve close coordination among federal agencies, state agencies, and local police, highlighting the importance of sustained training, exercises, and clear roles.

Recommended actions include:

- Developing a national “Mass Event Security and Response” curriculum through the Department of Homeland Security that covers drug-facilitated crimes, biometrics, counter-UAS operations, and human trafficking, with modules tailored to stadiums, fan festivals, and music events.
- Aligning federal grant guidance so states and localities can prioritize funding for technology integration, multi-agency exercises, and specialized training connected to upcoming FIFA matches, Olympic events, and major festivals.
- Requiring standardized after-action reports for federally supported events, capturing threat incidents, technology performance, interagency coordination successes, and lessons learned in a central repository.

Institutionalizing this knowledge will improve readiness not just for one tournament or festival season, but for all future large-scale events.

Conclusion

The United States is entering a period of exceptional global visibility as it prepares for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, the 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, and a sustained boom in large music festivals and other mass gatherings. These events showcase national strengths and community spirit, but they also present attractive targets for those who would exploit crowds, technologies, and complex logistics. By integrating advanced detection of drugs like ketamine and GHB, responsible use of facial recognition, modern digital anti-trafficking tools, robust counter-drone

capabilities, and comprehensive training for local law enforcement and event staff, the nation can significantly reduce risk while preserving the openness and celebration that define these occasions.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your leadership on this critical set of issues.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jonathan F. Thompson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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