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**“Combating Gang Violence on Long Island: Shutting Down the MS-13 Pipeline”**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Counterterrorism and Intelligence Sub-Committee, I wish to thank you for your invitation to appear and to testify at this hearing. My name is Dr. Howard M. Koenig and I am proud to serve as the Superintendent of Schools for the Central Islip Union Free School District.

The very violent activities of MS-13 have had a great and terrible impact on our schools and our community and most importantly on our students. The ability of criminal members of this gang to gain entry into the United States is something that goes far beyond any solution that the school districts and our local communities can resolve. However, since the gang’s success is measured in its recruiting new and younger members from our schools this is something, I believe, we can have a positive impact on reducing and preventing. It is that I would like to speak to you about today.

The prime young school-aged candidates for gang recruitment are isolated, frightened and feel very vulnerable. Their new country, new community and new schools can feel very unwelcoming. They have come, in so many cases, from places of extreme violence and death. Many have spent very little time, if any, in organized schooling. They do not speak the language of their new home. They are not familiar with the local customs or societal norms. They are missing and need structure and support in their lives. They seek a feeling of belonging.

It is our job in our schools to provide for the education of all of our resident students. We want to do that in a safe and secure environment. Our newly arrived students, very often, come with significant needs. We provide services based upon those needs. We partner with local community agencies to help these students. Agencies such as the Youth Enrichment Services program in the Town of Islip. With the help of programs from New York State and the U.S. Department of Education we had been able to provide help to our newly arrived students, not only during the school day but in after-school programs to help the students transition into their new communities. The present executive budget proposal would reduce funding by approximately 9.2 billion dollars for Education Department spending. The programs that we would lose and the help we would not be able to provide to these students include after-school programming, extended-day academic support, special education help and teacher development. The domino effect of the Federal cuts to the NY State budget will impact our ability to provide programs that we were previously able to offer. Why do I list these? It is because the loss of these programs hamper our ability to bring the newly arrived students into the mainstream of school life and provide to them a sense of belonging. It is the absence of this connection between the students and the mainstream of school life that makes them easy prey for the gang recruitment.

It can be postulated that these reductions become a tool which enhances successful gang recruitment activities.