

**Written Statement for the Record
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**Hearing before the
U.S. House Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency**

“Identifying the Enemy: Radical Islamist Terror”

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Chairman Perry, Ranking Member Watson Coleman, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this written statement for the record. I welcome the opportunity to discuss priorities and key actions of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to Counter Violent Extremism (CVE).

Overview of Threat

In recent years, the threat of violent extremism has evolved. Terrorists at home and abroad are attempting to radicalize and recruit individuals to commit acts of violence within the United States. As Secretary Johnson has said, we are in a new phase in the global terrorist threat.

DHS recognizes that the types of attacks we have seen at home and abroad are not just terrorist-directed attacks, but also terrorist-inspired attacks. These attacks are conducted by those who live among us in the homeland and become inspired and radicalized to violence by terrorist propaganda on the internet. We are concerned about attempts by ISIL and other terrorist groups to inspire lone offenders. For example, ISIL consistently releases high-quality English-language videos and magazines promoting its alleged caliphate and calling for supporters in the West to pursue attacks in their homelands.

Terrorist-inspired attacks are often difficult to detect by our intelligence and law-enforcement communities. They can occur with little or no notice, and present a complex homeland security challenge. As ISIL continues to lose territory, it has increased its attacks and attempted attacks on targets outside of Iraq and Syria. We were forcefully reminded of this on the morning of June 12, 2016 when over 300 individuals were terrorized in an Orlando night club by a man who shot and killed 49 individuals and injured 53 more. We believe he may have been inspired, in part, by terrorist organizations overseas, resulting in the worst mass shooting in U.S. history. Further, the events just last weekend in New York, New Jersey and Minnesota underscore the urgency of this issue.

The current threat environment requires us to build on conventional approaches to counterterrorism. Countering violent extremism (CVE) has become a key focus of DHS’s work to secure the homeland. Al Qaeda and ISIL continue to target Muslim American communities in our country to recruit and inspire individuals to commit acts of violence. Well-informed

families and communities are our best defense against terrorist ideologies, which represent the current threat from ISIL's propaganda. Within this context, working with communities to prevent radicalization to violence has become imperative. Muslims are undoubtedly the group most directly targeted by ISIL overseas. In the United States, they may also be best placed to identify potential indicators of ISIL-inspired attacks.

We also know that plots inspired by ISIL and al Qaeda are not the only violent extremist threats we face. These threats come from a range of groups and individuals, including domestic terrorists. Individuals inspired by ISIL and al Qaeda continue to pose the most immediate threat, as the attacks in San Bernardino and Orlando have demonstrated, but events in Charleston, Dallas, and Oak Creek illustrate that there are a range of behaviors and motivations that can lead to violent extremism domestically. As we tragically experienced fifteen years ago with the terrorist attacks on 9/11, a failure to adapt to an evolving threat can have devastating consequences, and we want to ensure that we are focused on the full landscape of the violent extremist spectrum.

The DHS Office for Community Partnerships (OCP) was set up to further our domestic CVE efforts and provide support to communities, state and local partners, and civic organizations who are actively seeking tools and resources to protect their communities. Since 9/11, we have seen time and time again that federal efforts to counter violent extremism will only be successful with the trust of local communities and stakeholders.

Taking our CVE Efforts to the Next Level

When Secretary Johnson announced an Office for Community Partnerships in 2015, he instructed me to focus the Department's efforts on countering violent extremism and work to build relationships and promote trust with local communities across the United States.

OCP's mission includes efforts to support and enhance efforts by key stakeholders to prevent and counter radicalization and recruitment to violence. The Office leverages the resources and relationships of the Department and applies the personal leadership of the Secretary and senior officials to empower leaders in both the public and private sectors by raising awareness of the threat of violent extremism.

We are focused on partnering with and empowering communities by providing them a wide range of resources to counter violent extremism. In addition, we are partnering with the private sector to find innovative, community-based approaches to countering violent extremism on social media. Key stakeholders and partners working with OCP include the private sector, civil society and local law enforcement. Influential community leaders such as religious leaders, city councils and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) work directly with OCP field staff in identifying community priority issues, conducting CVE community exercises, and addressing concerns at community engagement roundtables in partnership with the DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties. OCP also works with local, state, and federal law enforcement by providing training, exercises, and technical assistance.

Advancing that effort also means working in a unified and coordinated way across the U.S. government, which is the purpose of the interagency CVE Task Force announced in January 2016. The Task Force is hosted and currently led by DHS, and the leadership will rotate every two years between a DHS and a Department of Justice (DOJ) executive. The Task Force includes participation from over 10 departments and agencies across the federal government.

The mission of the Task Force is to organize CVE efforts across the federal government and coordinate a whole-of-government approach to empower local partners to prevent violent extremism in the United States. Specifically, its major objectives include coordinating and prioritizing federal CVE research and establishing feedback mechanisms to increase the relevance of CVE findings; synchronizing federal CVE outreach and engagement; managing CVE communications and leveraging digital technologies to engage, empower, and connect CVE stakeholders; and supporting the development of intervention programs. Ensuring that the nation's CVE efforts are sufficiently resourced as described in the President's FY 2017 Budget has been an integral part of our overall efforts.

International Efforts

Internationally, DHS regularly exchanges best practices and works to enhance our understanding of regional threat variation through multilateral and bilateral engagements. Robust international engagements enhance our understanding of the challenges posed by radicalization to violence and provide useful mechanisms for developing new approaches for addressing these challenges. Moving forward, we will pursue efforts to share promising practices and research among many countries to enhance our understanding and build a stronger evidence base.

In addition to our international partnerships, OCP also works closely with the State Department's Global Engagement Center (GEC). The Task Force leadership and GEC leadership regularly meet to discuss a range of CVE issues. In addition, the GEC Director and I have open lines of communication, as do a number of their key personnel with OCP and Task Force staff. DHS also has a full-time detailee to the GEC who regularly reports to and meets with Task Force personnel. Finally, the Task Force receives GEC guidance on messaging opportunities as well as ongoing strategic guidance on themes used by the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL, which are then disseminated to a range of key stakeholders as appropriate.

We also work closely with other Department of State offices on CVE-related issues. The Task Force works closely with the CT/CVE Bureau and the Department of State's CVE Director.

Working to De-legitimize ISIL

As the President recently noted after a counter-ISIL meeting with members of the National Security Council, "Groups like ISIL and al Qaeda want to make this war a war between Islam and America, or between Islam and the West. They want to claim that they are the true leaders of over a billion Muslims around the world who reject their crazy notions. They want us to validate them by implying that they speak for those billion-plus people; that they speak for Islam. That's their propaganda. That's how they recruit. And if we fall into the trap of

painting all Muslims with a broad brush and imply that we are at war with an entire religion -- then we're doing the terrorists' work for them.”¹

Within this context, the Department and the Administration continue to reject the terrorist narrative that the West and Islam are in conflict, as well as the notion that terrorists like ISIL genuinely represent Islam. To be successful in our homeland security efforts, we have to underscore and reinforce the fact that ISIL does not represent Islam and cannot justify its barbaric terrorism with twisted interpretations of one of the world's most prominent religions.

The President has also noted that Muslim American communities have a role to play in helping counter these narratives and addressing the perversion of Islam, but it is not the role of those who practice one faith alone. Every community has a role to play in active citizenry. And, while we do so, our civil rights and civil liberties must also be upheld. Ultimately, our CVE efforts will only be successful with the participation of all community leaders.

Countering Online Recruitment and Radicalization to Violence

As terrorist groups such as ISIL continue to undertake a deliberate strategy of using social media to reach into our country and recruit, radicalize, and mobilize individuals to violence, the private sector's efforts on this issue have become critical.

As part of supporting efforts to counter terrorist messaging and recruitment online, the Department supports the Peer-To-Peer (P2P): Challenging Extremism contests. Launched in 2005, P2P is a government-sponsored competition to empower students at universities to develop innovative and powerful social media campaigns that include positive, alternative, or counter narratives to challenge violent extremism. Student teams work with a faculty advisor while earning academic credit to research, design, and launch social media campaigns that have a measurable impact on their campus, community, and country.

Since its inception in spring 2015, more than 3,000 students representing 125 university teams from more than 30 countries have participated in this unique program. In fall 2016, DHS is supporting 50 teams at U.S. colleges and universities, and DHS remains committed to working with partners across the government to scale up these domestic student-designed campaigns and projects.

Facebook became the first technology partner to join the P2P project in the summer of 2015. As part of the partnership, Facebook sponsors a competition of the top three teams who demonstrate the best integration of Facebook into their broader digital and social media campaigns at the Facebook Global Digital Challenge event. Facebook also provides advertisement credits on their platform to each of the teams (domestic and international) during the competition. Facebook's participation has also allowed the initiative to expand to more than one hundred international teams in fall 2016.

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/06/14/remarks-president-after-counter-isil-meeting>

Through the P2P program, we have seen that young people are essential to our work in creating credible and positive messages that counter violent extremism. That is why, for example, DHS is currently working with partners across the government to scale up domestic student-designed campaigns and projects. This will require support from government, non-government organizations, and private sector partners to transition viable student projects to market.

At the Department, we are aware that there is a limit to the effectiveness of government efforts with regard to countering terrorist recruitment and radicalization to violence, particularly online. Local communities are best positioned to intervene, and they must address these issues with both online and offline solutions. We at DHS can act as a facilitator, connector, and convener, but ultimately, communities and individuals are best positioned to take action to counter violent extremism.

In addition to supporting the P2P program, the Task Force includes a team dedicated to communications and digital strategy. The Task Force builds partnerships with the private sector to identify and amplify credible voices to counter narratives promoted by ISIL, domestic terrorists, and other violent extremists. This includes a multi-platform communications strategy that leverages the use of digital technologies to engage, empower, and connect CVE stakeholders.

Ultimately, the Department believes that the innovative private sector that created so many technologies our society enjoys today can also help create tools to limit terrorists from using these technologies for terrorist recruitment and radicalization to violence. We applaud and are encouraged by the private sector's increasing efforts to address the fraction of their users exploiting their technologies for nefarious ends. In addition, we recognize the critical role that the private sector and NGOs can play in continuing their efforts to develop creative and effective solutions to counter how terrorists use media platforms for these purposes. Going forward, we will continue to convene a wide range of disciplines, including civil society, technology companies, and content producers. We are encouraged by a number of initiatives underway and applaud those who see the common challenge terrorism poses and are continuing to take proactive steps to make it harder for terrorists to operate.

DHS CVE Grants Program

In December 2015, Congress appropriated CVE funds in the FY 2016 Omnibus Appropriations Act, which allocated \$10 million in CVE grant funding to be administered jointly by OCP and FEMA. This is the first time federal funding at this level will be provided, on a competitive basis, specifically to support local CVE programming. And it is the first federal assistance program devoted exclusively to providing local communities with the resources to counter violent extremism in the homeland. The funding will be competitively awarded to state, tribal, territorial, and local governments, nonprofit organizations, and institutions of higher education to support new and existing community-based efforts to counter violent extremist recruitment and radicalization to violence.

The Department formally issued a notice of funding opportunity on July 6, 2016, announcing the new Countering Violent Extremism Grant Program. Applications were due September 6, and the response has been extraordinary. We received over 200 applications from 42 states, territories, and Washington, D.C. Applications are from a broad array of applicants: local and state governments; regional coalitions of governments, both law enforcement and non-law enforcement; universities and non-profits with a broad spectrum of missions, including peace and diplomacy, civic engagement, refugee services, and mental health services; and institutions with religious affiliations, including multiple faiths and interfaith organizations. As of today, the anticipated award date will be no later than December 1, 2016.

Moving Forward

Our efforts to develop a locally-driven, comprehensive, prevention-based CVE framework remain ongoing. We have taken great strides over recent months to professionalize and institutionalize the CVE infrastructure of the Department and the U.S. Government as a whole. However, more work remains.

Preventing future recruits to terrorism has become more important than ever. A generation ago, individuals may have been radicalized to violence by someone they knew in person over the course of several years; now, while that still takes place, it is far more common for individuals to be radicalized to violence online. One example of the older model in transition is Zachary Chesser, a Virginia native who pled guilty to supporting terrorists overseas and crimes of violence. He was a typical suburban Virginia youth: growing up, he was a good student and a soccer fan. He radicalized to violence between 2008 and 2010, integrating online violent extremist material with in-person relationships, and the exchange of formal letters.²

By contrast, we now see individuals recruited to fight for ISIL based on information obtained exclusively online. ISIL's deft use of the Internet, together with the wide availability of its messaging, has broadened the population of potentially vulnerable individuals and shortened the timespan of their recruitment.

Conclusion

The recent events in San Bernardino, Orlando, and most recently in New York, New Jersey and Minnesota highlight the urgency and severity of this threat. As such, the CVE efforts undertaken by both the Department and the CVE Task Force are paramount to address one of the most significant homeland security challenges facing the nation.

This is the vision we are working to implement today, through the important work of building a comprehensive CVE model that ensures safe and resilient communities in the homeland. Thank you again for the opportunity to address this critical issue.

² <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/CHESSER%20FINAL%20REPORT.pdf>