

Scott Erickson Written Testimony
House Homeland Security Committee
Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Accountability

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Good afternoon. Thank you, Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Ivey for giving me the opportunity to speak today on the important issue of political violence and, in particular, its impact on the law enforcement community.

I currently serve as the Director of the Center for Law and Justice at the America First Policy Institute (AFPI). Prior to joining AFPI, I spent three years at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security where I served in a variety of roles including as Deputy Chief of Staff during the summer of 2020, a period marred by widespread civil unrest and leftist-inspired violence, much of which was directed at the law enforcement community. Earlier in my career, I spent nearly two decades as a uniformed police officer in the City of San Jose, California. As a second-generation police officer, law enforcement has been—and remains—an important part of my identity.

The integrity of the law enforcement profession is of vital importance to not just public safety but to the maintenance of the rule of law itself. A civil society cannot function unless the institutions designed to uphold it remain intact. The rise of unchecked violence—particularly the phenomenon of anarchist or anti-fascist criminal activity—has caused untold damage to communities across our nation. It has also had a debilitating effect on law enforcement. Combined with the associated rise of anti-police rhetoric and the inane “defund the police” movement, these phenomena have contributed to a generational crisis in recruiting and retention within the law enforcement community. For those officers who remain on the job, morale is the lowest it’s been in a generation.

Confronting the rise of organized, far-left violence poses operational and tactical challenges for law enforcement. Every department’s capability to address these challenges is unique and each is equipped with different resources, training, expertise, and personnel. To improve the ability of departments to effectively confront these challenges often requires cross-jurisdictional collaboration and robust information sharing across the spectrum of federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies.

It is here where our federal partners can play an outsized role, particularly in the receipt, analysis, and dissemination of critical information relevant to emerging threats. Fusion centers, for instance, utilize a hub-and-spoke approach to synthesize and distribute information within and among state and local law enforcement partners. Federal law enforcement operating within the context of these information-sharing systems can often provide a more global view on emerging threats than what is available at the state or local level alone and they often have better visibility on spatially diffuse threats potentially coalescing toward a specific target.

Examples of ideologically aligned violent opportunists traveling across state lines to carry out coordinated acts of violence were evident in the recent attacks on the as-yet completed Atlanta

Public Safety Training Center. Of the 23 individuals arrested for crimes ranging from vandalism to assault, only 2 were from the state of Georgia. Two others were not even from the United States but had ostensibly traveled to Atlanta to engage in this coordinated criminal behavior.

More information means better preparation. The sooner a law enforcement agency is aware that a coordinated act of violence may be forthcoming, the better that agency will be able to marshal the resources necessary to effectively address the threat and protect their communities.

Robust collaboration is essential to the effective administration of justice. When such collaboration is absent, negative public safety outcomes become more likely. Portland over the summer of 2020 is a stark example. Local political intransigence prevented basic cooperation among federal, state, and local partners, resulting in over 100 days of violence and chaos as federal law enforcement personnel remained under siege within the Hatfield Federal Courthouse.

The political violence that occurred in Portland—and elsewhere throughout the country—during the summer of 2020 was disgraceful, and it should never happen again.

Let me conclude by saying that while each citizen has a role to play in the maintenance of an orderly society, it is the men and women of law enforcement who undergird that proposition. We must empower them to do their jobs safely and effectively.

Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss this important topic. I look forward to your questions.