

Statement for the Record by

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**Hearing Before the U.S House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Emergency Management & Technology**

"Mass Gathering Events: Assessing Security Coordination and Preparedness"

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Thank you Chairman Strong and Ranking Member Kennedy for holding today's hearing.

I am here today representing the Major County Sheriffs of America (MCSA), a professional law enforcement association of the largest Sheriff's offices across the country. Our members serve more than one third of the United States population. Our membership is comprised of Sheriffs Offices serving counties with a population of 400,000 or more and employing over 700 personnel.

As Sheriff of Orange County, I lead an agency of more than 4,000 men and women who provide exceptional public safety services to 3.13 million residents. As a major population center and popular tourist destination in the Southern California region, mass gathering events are a regular occurrence in our area of responsibility.

Nationwide, managing the security for mass gathering events and addressing associated public safety impacts largely fall on the shoulders of sheriffs and our partners in city police departments.

Mass Gathering Dynamics

There are several types of mass gathering events that present a multitude of risks and security concerns. These mass gatherings can occur daily at destinations like Disneyland in Orange County, CA or the Disney World Resort in Orange County, Florida. There are annual mass gathering events like the Coachella and Stagecoach Music Festivals in Riverside County, California. This past year many of my colleagues were responsible for ensuring the safety of those who attended the various political events associated with the 2024 election. And there are quasi-spontaneous events like protests. The unpredictable nature of these events often makes them the most complex.

Finally, there are the once-in-a-generation events we are primarily focused on today-the FIFA World Cup and the Olympics. It has been three decades since our nation hosted these events so close to each other. The FIFA World Cup 1994 and 1996 Olympics in Atlanta were significant moments for our country. Neither were without their challenges. World Cup games were

hosted in Los Angeles just six months after the devastating North Ridge Earthquake. The Atlanta Games featured memorable scenes like Muhammad Ali lighting the Olympic Torch and Keri Strug securing Gold for Team USA, but the Games were also marked by a deadly terrorist bombing at Centennial Park.

Thirty years later we will host these events in Southern California and in a dozen other regions under a much more complex threat environment. We have greater technology available to assist with our security efforts, but risks associated with cyber-attack are ever present. Our border is more secure since the beginning of this year, but many of the nefarious actors who entered our country over the last four years remain. An event that hosts visitors from all corners of the world brings with it tensions from the multitude of conflicts occurring around the globe.

Mitigating these risks falls to all those of us entrusted with national security, homeland security and local public safety. We must always remember that we have no national security or homeland security without local public safety. We can be successful in our goal of a safe World Cup and Olympics if we use proven strategies we know work and if we are properly resourced with the right mix of people and technology.

Successful Strategies

Today I will highlight strategies my colleagues and I believe are most worthy of this Committee's focus and efforts.

Communication Among Law Enforcement Partners. Sharing intelligence information across levels of government is critical. This type of communication can best occur through the National Network of Fusion Centers. Fusion centers are where local, state, federal, and private sector partners collaborate to analyze and share threat-related information. In Orange County, we use our fusion center regularly in our work to help maintain safety at mass gathering events.

A recent example occurred in the Spring of 2024 when multiple Orange County law enforcement agencies were called to respond to protests at the University of California, Irvine centered on the conflict in the Middle East. Activity associated with the protests was deemed unlawful and necessitated action by law enforcement. The fusion center played a central role in communicating intelligence to personnel on the ground, resulting in a safe conclusion to the event.

This work highlights the need for those who work at the 80 recognized state and regional fusion centers around the nation to maintain access to local, regional, state, and federal sources of information at the classified and unclassified levels. This includes continued access to law enforcement records, criminal intelligence databases, the Homeland Security Information Network (HSIN), the Homeland Security Data Network (HSDN), the FBI's Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS), the FBI Network (FBI Net), DHS's Treasury Enforcement Communications System (TECS), and systems for collecting and sharing tips, leads and threat-to-life data.

This access enables fusion centers to add local and regional context to national intelligence, as well as provide information and value-added intelligence to support counterterrorism and other criminal investigations that would otherwise be difficult or unlikely for lead Federal, state, or local investigative agencies to obtain through traditional channels.

Use of Incident Command System (ICS). The Orange County Sheriff's Department has long used ICS to manage our response to emergencies and plan for special events. ICS is a standardized approach to the command, control, and coordination of a public safety response. ICS was initially created by Southern California fire chiefs in 1968 to organize their response to wildfires. It has proven to be a scalable model that can be applied to a variety of public safety incidents and events. My department has utilized ICS in response to barricaded suspects, active shooters, and emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. We have also used ICS in the planning of large-scale events, like the August 2008 Saddleback Civil Forum which featured the presidential nominees of both parties.

When used properly, ICS is particularly effective when multiple agencies are involved in an event or response to an incident. The model is rooted in the concept of defined roles, a common hierarchy, and a commitment by all involved to the planning process. On July 13, 2024, we saw the tragic results that can occur when roles are not clearly defined. In reviews of the attempted assassination of then-former President Trump, it was clear that several tasks and responsibilities were not carried out due to lack of coordination. The ICS model is designed to ensure coordination takes place and that all involved are clear on their specific roles.

Embedded Personnel. Federal personnel should be embedded with local staff during events where they have a role. For example, in Orange County we have had several events featuring the President, Vice President, presidential candidates, and other Secret Service protectees. Having an embedded secret service agent with our personnel has enhanced communication and filled information gaps that could be exploited by bad actors.

Recommendations for Congress

Based on the success of these strategies I recommend this Committee work to support and implement the following:

Ensure Use of ICS Construct. Law enforcement across multiple jurisdictions need to be on the same page. If we all are utilizing ICS, people will know their roles, responsibilities and easily integrate with one another. In my view it is important that federal agencies adopt the ICS model for their incidents and responses. ICS is a universal model used by public safety agencies throughout the nation. Adaptation by federal agencies would ensure better integration when they work with state and local agencies during mass gathering events.

Sustained Federal Investment in Homeland Security Funding. Continued and enhanced federal funding is essential to preparedness, providing support for strategic planning, and maintaining operational readiness. The Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI), State Homeland Security Grant

Program (SHSGP), and Operation Stonegarden provide funding that supports intelligence sharing through fusion centers, builds critical incident response capabilities, and creates federal-local partnerships that strengthen national security. These programs have transformed our prevention, preparedness, and response capabilities for both terrorist threats and natural disasters, creating capacity that would not exist without federal support. A major part of our nation's threat prevention and response capabilities are sustained by FEMA grant funding – primarily through UASI and SHSGP. The information access and analytical collaboration enabled by these grants cannot be easily replicated. Therefore, it is a core federal responsibility to ensure these programs continue to support capabilities that would otherwise be unavailable to the federal government.

Direct grant funding to local agencies—bypassing state-level intermediaries—would eliminate bureaucratic hurdles, reduce administrative overhead, and deliver resources more effectively to frontline departments where they matter most.

Counter UAS Authority. Drones have proven to be significantly beneficial for public safety and emergency response, and we anticipate that drone capabilities will be leveraged extensively to help protect World Cup and Olympic sites. Congressional support through legislation like HR 1058, the DRONE Act, co-sponsored by Representatives Correa and Nehls can help.

At the same time, the unauthorized misuse of drones presents a significant security concern for mass events. Mass gathering events are vulnerable to unauthorized Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS), which puts both public safety and national security at risk. This was seen the past summer when concerts were paused due to drone activity.

Current federal law limits the use of counter-UAS technologies, such as signal jamming, tracking, and drone interdiction, to just four federal agencies. This legal gap is dangerous and must be addressed. Lawmakers must establish a legal framework that provides broad-based, but carefully regulated authority for locals to deploy and operate counter-UAS systems. This framework must be supported by funding, training, oversight, and transparency.

Alleviate Resource Impacts on Local Law Enforcement. The number of simultaneous events in multiple cities across the nation will put stress on our resources. We must remember that law enforcement presence will be needed not only at the games themselves but also at the locations that will house the millions of visitors traveling into and around our country.

Much of what we do will fall on the shoulders of our existing personnel. The overtime costs associated with filling shifts will put a burden on our local agency budgets. Local agencies alone cannot shoulder the burden for additional personnel, equipment, technology, and supplies required to protect thousands of athletes and foreign dignitaries, and secure Olympic housing and competition facilities across hundreds of square miles. Federal grant funding to help offset these costs – which has been provided during previous Olympic Games hosted in the United States – will help us maintain operations associated with these events while also fulfilling our day-to-day law enforcement responsibilities in our communities.

These recommendations are the four best things Congress and the administration can do to ensure the 2026 FIFA World Cup and 2028 Olympic Games are remembered as the safest and most secure on record. Sheriffs stand ready and willing to work with you and your colleagues. I look forward to answering your questions.