



RICHARD W. STANEK
HENNEPIN COUNTY SHERIFF

February 24, 2015

The Honorable Bob Goodlatte
Chairman, Committee on the Judiciary
2138 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-2616

Dear Congressman Goodlatte,

Thank you kindly for the invitation to testify before the Committee on the Judiciary's Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security, and Investigations on Thursday, February 26, 2015 at 10:00am.

We have been hard at work here in Hennepin County, reaching out to community leaders and residents to find ways in which we can collaborate and counter violent extremism. I look forward to this opportunity to share our efforts with your committee and to engage in thoughtful discussion on improving the safety of communities throughout this great nation.

Attached you will find my written testimony for the hearing.

Sincerely,

Richard W. Stanek
Hennepin County Sheriff



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U.S. House Judiciary
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security, and Investigations
Thursday, February 26, 2015
Testimony by Sheriff Richard W. Stanek

Thank you, Chairman Sensenbrenner and Congresswoman Jackson Lee, for your invitation to testify this morning about our Community Engagement efforts in the Twin Cities, and, in particular, our outreach to the Somali Diaspora Community.

I am Sheriff Rich Stanek from Hennepin County, Minnesota. a very diverse County with 1.2 million residents:

- 425,000 are non-Caucasian;
- Our population is growing and demographics are changing every day; and
- We have 40,000 Oromo, 35,000 Liberians, and nearly 100,000 Somali residents living in Hennepin County.

Mr. Chair and Members, last week, I joined our U.S. Attorney, and other law enforcement and community leaders from Minnesota in participating in the White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism. We learned firsthand in late 2008 about the reality of radicalization when we had dozens of young men radicalized by Al Shabaab, and leave the Twin Cities to fight in Somalia. Several have been confirmed killed fighting for Al Shabaab. At least 2 were suicide bombers, including the first confirmed suicide bomber from the United States, Shirwa Ahmed. Most of these young men had never seen Somalia, they knew only of their American lives. The parents were shocked their sons would return to the place they had so desperately fled.

The threat of radicalization from designated terrorist organizations, whether from Al Shabaab or ISIS/ISIL, has become even more invasive: YouTube videos, chat rooms, ordinary looking Facebook pages with links to increasingly violent radical on-line programs, training and ideology.

And these threats are real: just this week, Al Shabaab released another propaganda video on YouTube mentioning the Mall of America in Bloomington, Minnesota (one of the largest cities in Hennepin County) encouraging Al Shabaab followers to act out. This is a marked change in the message: from recruiting people to train overseas, to recruiting Americans to train and act out here in the homeland, akin to a lone wolf.

In response we issued a joint media statement that included the participation of local, state and federal law enforcement and Mall of America Security, a private corporation. We have developed these public-private partnerships that also include Somali Community leaders: educators, members of the business community, and faith leaders – to strengthen the public safety fabric of our communities.



Our efforts at first were to respond, but now we work to prevent and intervene. We work to educate community leaders and family members about the threat of radicalization, and help them identify the behaviors that can be cause for concern:

- Withdrawal from family and normal social circles.
- Accessing radical religious or jihadist websites.
- Forming close relationships within a small group of likeminded people.
- Obtaining large sums of money – conducting fundraising efforts.
- Acquiring travel documents.

We are concerned about young people in isolation, who cut themselves off from their family and support network. So we encourage parents – mothers and fathers – educators, the business community, community leaders and faith leaders, to close their own generational and cultural gaps, and reach out to at-risk youth. We all share a common mission in protecting our kids and our future.

At first, traditional methods for building communities of trust weren't working. We had language and cultural barriers that required new strategies:

- Translations were difficult at best.
- Men didn't want women at meetings.
- Certain groups were in opposition to other groups.
- The greatest barrier of all: Somalis were distrustful of law enforcement -- because in their home country law enforcement often operates as the arm of an oppressive government.

The key to overcoming these barriers was the one-on-one personal relationship between Imam Roble and me. We've been friends for more than 5 years now, and any success the Sheriff's Office has had in engaging the Somali Diaspora in Hennepin County is due largely to Imam Roble and his guidance and leadership. After many conversations, he agreed to help us, and leant credibility to our efforts. Others trusted us, because he trusted us. He became our sponsor in the community, personally asking members to attend One Day Citizen- Academies customized for the Somali community. We let everyone know that we would be working with everyone: Elders, Religious leaders, Women and Youth.

We followed up with those early connections, and hired the first sworn Somali Deputy Sheriff in Minnesota, Haissan Hussein. We added a Somali community member as a civilian in our Community Engagement Team, Abdi Mohamed. Imam Roble serves as a member of our Community Advisory Board.

A great example of our new level of engagement: A Somali woman on our Community Advisory Board assisted us in adopting a new policy on religious head coverings (hijabs) in the jail. This



new policy is just one way for my office to show the community that we are not only listening, we are acting.

For me and law enforcement officers like me across the Country, fulfilling our Oath of Office means more than respect, we protect the privacy and civil liberties of all residents, in addition to their safety. For us, this is what it means to serve and protect.

In Hennepin County, we continue our hiring efforts to create an Agency as diverse as the County, to better reflect the community we serve, and to break down communication and cultural barriers. Each contact is an opportunity for us to demonstrate our commitment to building trusting and lasting relationships – to create resiliency.

With Imam Roble's guidance, I've learned, the most important member of our Community Engagement Team is ...me. Our community leaders want to be respected. This isn't a job to delegate to someone else but a responsibility shared throughout the entire Agency, starting at the top.

Violent extremism is a local threat; local law enforcement will be the first to respond and we should be at the front line to educate and strengthen our communities, and prevent or disrupt these threats.

Our local law enforcement efforts coincide with the White House National Strategy for Counterterrorism, to protect our local communities in ways that are "consistent with our values as a nation and as a people:"

- By addressing the needs of residents,
- By hearing their concerns,
- By encouraging participation and community ownership,
- By educating residents about our criminal justice system, and
- By protecting their civil rights and liberties, ...

We are strengthening our communities and building resiliency. We are presenting our American model of self-government and the rule of law, an alternative to the radical message and ideology, a model of freedom and opportunity, education, dignity and hope.

Thank you Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee, I'd be happy to take questions.