



TESTIMONY OF

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BEFORE

Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Responsiveness and Accountability to
Oversight
United States House of Representatives

ON

“Hearing on Compliance with Committee Oversight”

June 22, 2023
Washington, DC

Chairman Cline, Ranking Member Swalwell, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:

I am honored to appear before you today. My name is Zephrairie Buetow and I serve as the Assistant Secretary for Legislative Affairs at the Department of Homeland Security – or DHS. With nearly a decade of experience on Capitol Hill, I have a deep appreciation for the important work of Congress and a true respect for its oversight responsibilities. Congressional oversight is vital to our functioning democracy.

The congressional affairs teams across DHS – who are mostly dedicated career public servants – work tirelessly to respond to oversight requests, constituent casework, and other time-sensitive matters. Since January 20, 2021, the Department has responded to over 1,400 congressional letters. During the 117th Congress, DHS participated in 123 congressional hearings and over 4,500 non-hearing engagements, such as CODELs, STAFFDELS, demonstrations, site visits, and roundtables. In the first few months of the 118th Congress, the Department has received over 200 congressional letters, including a significant number of expansive requests for information and documents. Additionally, DHS has provided 45 witnesses to 30 hearings, and participated in over 1,200 briefings and other non-hearing engagements since the beginning of this Congress. We are making great efforts to meet the increased oversight demands from Congress.

In addressing the large volume of requests, we must balance the legitimate oversight interests of Congress with the Department’s law enforcement and national security responsibilities and the Executive Branch’s confidentiality interests. DHS depends on subject matter experts throughout the Department for the information needed to provide accurate and complete responses to congressional inquiries. Not surprisingly, these experts are often the same leaders and operators performing the Department’s many critical missions. As a result, information needed may not always be available within the timetable requested. In some cases, operational dynamics or the need for interagency coordination may delay or limit responses. To that end, we conduct regular meetings with DHS offices and components to work collaboratively to respond to congressional requests.

The Committee indicated this hearing would examine responses to its oversight requests. Since the beginning of the 118th Congress, the Committee has sent eight document request letters to the Department and its components, some of which incorporate or reference a number of requests that were made in the last Congress. The Department is complying with the Committee’s requests voluntarily and in good faith consistent with the accommodation process. To date, the Department has produced over 2,200 pages of documents responsive to the letters received during this Congress as well as over 500 pages responsive to requests made during the prior Congress – and provided multiple substantive written responses to the Committee’s letters. We will continue to review potentially responsive records and will produce any additional records, as appropriate, as they become available.

We are committed to cooperating with the Committee’s legitimate efforts to seek information, consistent with our obligation to protect the Executive Branch’s confidentiality and other interests. We look forward to continued engagement with the Committee. Thank you for your partnership in service to the American people. I look forward to answering your questions.