



Written Testimony of

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Introduction

Chairwoman Roybal-Allard, Ranking Member Fleischmann, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for holding today's hearing about the Office for Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention (OTVTP).

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) stands committed to enhancing our collective ability to prevent all forms of terrorism and targeted violence.¹ We need to make it harder to carry out an attack and reduce the potential loss of life by preventing individuals from radicalizing to violence at the earliest possible moment.² Achieving this objective is beyond the Federal government's capability and role alone. Thus, DHS has adopted a whole-of-society approach that builds trusted partnerships across all levels of government and among a multidisciplinary set of local actors, including houses of worship, civic organizations, health practitioners, government agencies, law enforcement, and others. In short, the DHS prevention mission centers on building a local capacity to prevent targeted violence and terrorism.

All forms of terrorism and targeted violence weaken the very fabric of our society, injecting trauma, fear, mistrust and despair into the body politic. But the events of January 6th bore witness to the changing threat landscape facing us. Recent Congressional testimonies from both the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and our own Secretary delivered a simple message—the danger posed from Domestic Violent Extremism (DVE) represents one of the most serious terrorism-related threat facing the United States today. The Department is harnessing all its relevant resources to address the threat from DVE and will continue building this comprehensive approach. At the same time, we remain vigilant about the threat of international terrorism, including the threat posed by individuals who are inspired by the ideology of terrorist organizations overseas, such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda remains

¹ "In 2019, the Department added 'targeted violence' to its prevention mission, to expand beyond terrorism. The goals of any targeted violence attack may lack a discernable political or ideological motive, but inflict the same type of trauma on communities. Consequently, OTVTP works with communities to prevent these types of attacks which include attacks on schools, workplaces, public gatherings, and other settings.

² Radicalizing to violence can be defined as the process wherein an individual comes to believe that the threat or use of unlawful violence is necessary or justified to accomplish a goal. It is limited to the process by which individuals come to engage in terrorism or targeted violence.

The Department's targeted violence and terrorism prevention mission is central to our national response to this changing threat landscape. OTVTP seeks a resilient America where communities are united to bring an end to the tragedies inflicted by acts of targeted violence and terrorism. To accomplish this, OTVTP provides technical, financial and educational assistance to establish and expand local prevention frameworks. The Office also serves as the key node for the Department's prevention efforts, serving as the primary liaison to federal departments and agencies, state and local governments, non-governmental organizations, industry, and international efforts related to terrorism and targeted violence prevention.

OTVTP has made significant progress since it received enhanced resources in Fiscal Year (FY) 2020, and the task of ensuring all localities have access to prevention resources is a demanding, multi-year effort that we continue in FY 2021. We look forward to sharing our progress with you today and continuing to work with you to further our efforts across the country.

Addressing Violent Extremism

The recent expansion of the DVE threat is tied to a growing list of motivations based on a diverse set of catalysts. Today, acts of terrorism and other ideologically motivated violence by DVEs pose a lethal and persistent terrorism-related threat to the homeland. This threat encompasses a range of DVE actors, including racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists and anti-government violent extremists, and is fueled by false narratives, conspiracy theories, and violent extremist rhetoric spread through social media and other online platforms. A range of issues motivates these individuals, including anger over COVID-19 restrictions, the 2020 presidential election results, and police use of force, as well as a broad range of extreme racial, political, anti-government, anti-law enforcement, societal, and even personal ideological beliefs. The events of January 6th have only emboldened DVEs who feel inspired by the attack on the Capitol, may view violence as increasingly normalized, and harbor a volatile mix of grievances and continue to seek opportunities to incite or commit violence.

Addressing DVE is a top priority for DHS, and we are taking immediate steps to ensure all available resources are devoted to combatting this violence. This undertaking requires nothing less than a Department-wide effort, which the Secretary has initiated. Within the first 30 days of the Secretary's tenure, he designated me (Assistant Secretary John Cohen) as the senior official

to organize, plan, and oversee the Department's operational coordination and response to all terrorism-related threats, including those from DVEs. He also released a National Terrorism Advisory System Bulletin in late January highlighting the DVE threat. This was the first Bulletin that had been issued in the past year.

Additionally, one of our most critical missions at the Department is to provide intelligence to the broadest audience, at the lowest classification level possible, while protecting privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties. In support of this objective, the Secretary also is reviewing the Department's intelligence analysis and information sharing capabilities, particularly in collaboration with state and local partners. The Secretary also designated combating DVE as a National Priority Area for the FY 2021 State Homeland Security Grant Program and the Urban Area Security Initiative grant programs at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), thereby requiring 7.5 percent (up from 5 percent) of awards to support efforts combatting DVE.

In the coming months, the Department intends to continue enhancing its efforts to address the DVE threat and the factors driving its growth. As referenced in the recent ODNI/DHS/DOJ threat assessment, the links between domestic extremists and foreign actors are a concern. We seek to better understand the growing operational collaboration between DVEs in the United States with those operating in Europe and other parts of the globe. The Department also looks to expand the ability to use the watch-listing process, screening and vetting protocols, and travel pattern analysis to detect domestic and foreign travel by known violent extremists. We are working closely with our government partners, and foreign counterparts, on this work.

Additionally, DHS is enhancing public awareness and resiliency to disinformation and other false narratives that continue to inspire DVE. The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) leads part of this effort through its Mis/Dis/Malinformation Task Force (formerly known as the Countering Foreign Influence Task Force). The Department is also updating its "If You See Something, Say Something[®]" public awareness campaign and refreshing the Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative to build our partners' ability to identify, assess, and report tips linked to potential acts of targeted violence and terrorism, regardless of ideology.

Expanding the Prevention Mission

The Department's focus remains on increasing its partnerships and investments in local communities to enhance our targeted violence and terrorism prevention capabilities nationwide. A core component of this effort is empowering our partners to identify and counter the false narratives and extremist rhetoric that incite violence that are often spread through social media and other online platforms. The Department also works with industry partners, particularly technology companies, to develop voluntary, innovative approaches to identify and mitigate violent extremist content under their terms of service and community standards. This includes building greater public awareness and resilience to disinformation by developing and sharing digital media literacy and online critical thinking resources. All such efforts operate with appropriate oversight to ensure the protection of civil rights and civil liberties.

Additionally, the Department will increase available training and technical assistance to communities to build behavioral threat assessment and management capabilities necessary to identify individuals at risk of radicalizing to violence.³ For example, we are working with FEMA, the United States Secret Service (USSS), and the Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers (FLETC) to provide training to state and local law enforcement on topics such as the use of crisis intervention teams and how to integrate multidisciplinary threat assessment and management teams into efforts to prevent terrorism and targeted violence.

OTVTP plays an essential role in coordinating these efforts across DHS in a unified approach. The Office has three key roles in facilitating the Department's prevention mission:

1. **Capacity Building:** OTVTP provides financial, educational, and technical assistance to state and local partners to build local prevention frameworks to reduce the number of people susceptible to radicalization to violence, while also helping those who may be radicalizing to violence to disengage before violence occurs.
2. **Address Emerging Violent Narratives:** While protecting civil rights and civil liberties, OTVTP will continue building upon its existing efforts and collaboration with industry and non-governmental partners to identify online narratives that can incite violence, and initiate efforts to prevent, impede, and counter their spread.

³ For more on behavioral threat assessment and management teams, see https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/threat_assessment_and_management_teams.pdf.

3. Departmental Coordination: OTVTP serves as the central coordinating body for the Department's targeted violence and terrorism prevention mission and ensures activities across the Department advance the objectives set forth in the Department's *Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence*.

The Office will continue endeavoring to fully empower a whole-of-society approach that builds trusted partnerships across all levels of government and among a multidisciplinary set of local partners.

Local Prevention Frameworks

The central organizing principle of OTVTP's prevention mission is the local prevention framework that empowers state and local partners to prevent targeted violence and terrorism. These frameworks focus on providing help to individuals who may be radicalizing, or who have radicalized, to violence. Local prevention frameworks empower concerned individuals and organizations to put awareness training into action by ensuring bystanders are aware of locally available prevention resources and know how to get help for individuals radicalizing to violence. Successful prevention frameworks are locally designed and implemented because each community is unique, with different needs, resources, and challenges. Research shows that those radicalizing to violence exhibit behavioral indicators during their progression that are recognizable to many but best understood by those closest to the individual, such as peers, friends, and family. These changes in behavior and verbal cues serve as potential openings to refer and seek help for that individual before he or she commits an act of targeted violence or terrorism.

An effective local prevention framework succeeds by connecting all segments of a community through stakeholder engagement, public awareness, threat assessment and management, and support services.⁴ Later this year, OTVTP intends to publish a comprehensive baseline capabilities resource that outlines the recommended minimum functional requirements for an effective local prevention framework.

The potential for prevention efforts to impinge on protected speech or other civil rights and civil liberties is a real concern that OTVTP takes seriously. Recently, OTVTP implemented

⁴ For more on local prevention frameworks, see <https://www.dhs.gov/tvtp>.

a strategic engagement process with civil rights and civil liberties organizations, as well as other community-based organizations, to address concerns regarding targeted violence and terrorism prevention activities. The Office plans to initiate a listening tour with organizations that express concerns regarding prevention activities, and to establish an ongoing community engagement process on this topic. In the meantime, OTVTP continues to work closely with the DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties to ensure all programs consider the potential impacts on rights and liberties prior to implementation now and in the future.

OTVTP Support for Local Prevention Frameworks

OTVTP utilizes a diverse set of resources to establish and expand local prevention frameworks. Through the provision of technical assistance services, the Office provides subject matter assistance to establish and expand local prevention frameworks. Through grants and other financial assistance, OTVTP invests in local prevention efforts that generate promising practices that can also serve as models or templates for replication in other localities. Finally, through education and awareness training, OTVTP ensures that all stakeholders possess the knowledge needed to recognize and prevent targeted violence and terrorism.

Technical Assistance

OTVTP's Field Operations team works alongside state and local partners and leverages technical assistance services to accelerate the establishment and expansion of local prevention frameworks. Regional prevention coordinators (RPCs) engage the whole-of-society at the local level by helping communities establish and expand prevention frameworks tailored to their specific environment. They also provide a wide range of services such as convening and engaging stakeholders, information sharing, trainings, and prevention-related exercises. OTVTP field-deployed personnel are currently located in Atlanta, Denver, Los Angeles, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Newark, Omaha, Richmond, Sacramento, and Seattle.

The Field Operations team accomplishes its mission through cultivating trusted partnerships with state and local stakeholders representing whole-of-society within any one locality. The team engages a wide range of government and community-based organizations to build the multidisciplinary teams foundational to local prevention frameworks. For example, in Texas, Virginia, and Illinois, RPCs have convened school safety personnel to discuss how

localized behavioral threat assessment and management programs could assist educators in K-12 schools, as well as colleges and universities. The RPCs in Newark, Atlanta, Denver, and Chicago are working with Federal partners and behavioral health professionals to recommend case referral processes for those showing behavioral indicators of radicalization to violence, including collaborations with the FBI and other parts of the Department of Justice to identify available resources that may help to mitigate, disrupt, and/or deter subjects of concern from targeted violence.

Our most developed program is in Colorado, a state where we have had the longest duration of field staff presence. Over the past five years, the RPC in Denver worked alongside colleagues from the U.S. Attorney's Office, the State of Colorado's Homeland Security Advisor's Office, and numerous state and local partners to craft local prevention frameworks blanketing the state. The RPC trained and supported law enforcement crisis intervention teams, school threat assessment teams, and mental and social service professionals across the state to ensure they had the knowledge and tools needed to act on potential cases of individuals radicalizing to violence. Results of this work show that 100 individuals displaying behavioral indicators of radicalization to violence entered into behavioral threat assessment and management through these prevention efforts.

Financial Assistance

Financial assistance is a key complement to OTVTP's technical assistance services. OTVTP funds prevention capabilities with nonprofits, universities, and state, local, tribal, and territorial government (SLTT) agencies. Specifically, the Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention Grant Program invests in the establishment and expansion of local prevention frameworks, the construction of specific programs that support larger prevention frameworks (e.g., training initiatives or engagement vehicles), and the innovation needed to ensure future prevention approaches are more efficient and effective. In FY 2020, OTVTP worked with FEMA to award \$10 million to 29 grantees across 15 states. These funds provided support for the establishment of 10 new local prevention frameworks and the expansion of two existing frameworks, as well as several innovative prevention projects.

In the current fiscal year, OTVTP will double its investment in these programs to \$20 million. OTVTP is also building a more transparent capability to share lessons learned and

promising practices from these investments, so that localities can employ them when building their own prevention frameworks. To support this effort, OTVTP worked with the Office for Management and Budget and the DHS Science and Technology Directorate to develop and implement a robust evaluation plan for the grant program. The resulting assessments and evaluations explain how and why grantees met the goals and objectives of their proposals, and provide evidence supporting the future adoption of promising practices and lessons learned.

Educational Assistance

OTVTP coordinates, implements, and updates the Department's education efforts addressing local prevention frameworks. Currently, OTVTP is developing a fully integrated curriculum to support the knowledge requirements of SLTT partners who are establishing and expanding local prevention frameworks. OTVTP is updating its educational offerings to better reflect the evolving threat landscape and new lessons learned about effective prevention programs. OTVTP also is creating new educational products to discuss the behavioral changes that could indicate radicalization to violence, and will soon launch a new online awareness toolkit to inform the public of the risks that exist within the online environment and how to quickly identify signs of harmful online activity.

Later this year, OTVTP plans to launch a nationwide public outreach campaign designed to provide practical information on how to participate in local prevention efforts, in a similar manner that the Department's Blue Campaign has built awareness and public action to address trafficking in persons.

Strategic Engagement and Addressing Online Elements of Prevention

OTVTP provides outreach to various sectors, including government, civil society, and private industry, to ensure that they understand, validate, support, and champion local prevention efforts. Stakeholder engagement and coordination are at the forefront of every program and activity OTVTP conducts. One example of this effort is OTVTP's strategic engagement with the technology sector. A key mechanism for this work is through *Digital Forums on Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention*. These Forums provide participants with greater awareness of activity online that radicalizes to violence, increase digital literacy, and offer a platform for local and sector-specific leaders to engage with tech companies, practitioners, and experts to

discuss innovative responses in the digital space. The most recent Digital Forum focused on the online gaming and eSports industries and included nearly 300 attendees from non-governmental and non-profit organizations, state and local governments, academia, and the tech sector. Participants discussed the manipulation of gaming platforms by malicious actors, and also highlighted the positive ways that gaming helps provide a sense of community and fosters important protective factors against radicalization to violence, particularly in times of social isolation.

OTVTP's strategic engagement with the technology industry is not only limited to DHS-led efforts like the Digital Forums. OTVTP, representing DHS, along with the National Security Council and other departments and agencies, engages with technology companies on counterterrorism and terrorism prevention efforts, most notably by working through the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT), which has issue-specific working groups. The GIFCT is a nongovernmental organization bringing together technology industry, government, civil society, and academia to foster collaboration and information sharing to counter online terrorist and violent extremist activity online.

Conclusion

The Department's targeted violence and terrorism prevention mission is central to our national response to the changing threat landscape, especially online. While OTVTP has made significant progress bringing this prevention mission to scale, DHS knows that ensuring all localities have prevention frameworks will take more time and effort. We look forward to continuing to work with you and other Members of Congress as we implement this critical effort.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today and we look forward to your questions.