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Subcommittee on National Security of the
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“Combating Homegrown Terrorism”
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Remarks by George Selim, Director, DHS Office for Community Partnerships

Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is George Selim, and I lead the Office for Community Partnerships (OCP) for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). We are focused on terrorism prevention efforts, also known as countering violent extremism (CVE).

In my ten-plus years of working in the terrorism prevention space in the Executive Branch – including at the Department of Justice, the Department of Homeland Security, and the National Security Council staff – I have seen how important our communities are to accomplishing this mission. I have personally worked with civic leaders and local agencies and citizens who have raised concerns about individuals in their neighborhoods – tips and insights we may not have received otherwise – and with many patriotic community leaders who have sought to stand up and be part of the solution in countering terrorist recruitment and radicalization to violence in their communities. I have worked with leaders from a variety of localities across the United States, such as Chicago, Illinois; Dearborn, Michigan; and Columbus, Ohio, as well as many other cities, and I have engaged with a range of international stakeholders, such as from Somalia, Jordan, and Indonesia – and the most common question I get from local leaders no matter from where they originate is, “How can I help?”

Terrorism prevention efforts complement traditional counterterrorism investigative and prosecutorial processes, focusing on the disruption of the beliefs of violent extremists (e.g., violent ideology) and their will to act on those beliefs by taking criminal or violent actions (i.e., mobilization). Community-based training and engagement programs can be used to mitigate recruitment and interdict individuals radicalizing to violence earlier in the process – in that way contributing to the safety of the homeland. It must be a priority to reduce recruiters’ ability to influence vulnerable individuals, and we must work to increase the likelihood that communities are inhospitable to terrorist recruitment.

Historically, OCP has pursued a number of activities to advance the terrorism prevention mission. We have engaged with stakeholders around the United States to open the doors to dialogue and build trust. We work with other departments and agencies to provide Community Awareness Briefings that demonstrably increase the understanding of how terrorist groups recruit and inspire violence. My office has deployed field staff to more than a dozen cities nationwide to bolster engagement with and between governmental organizations, not least of which are state and local law enforcement agencies, as well as community and civic organizations. Additionally, we have engaged young people through the internationally recognized public-private partnership titled, “Peer to Peer: Countering Extremism.” “Peer to Peer,” featured in last week’s *New York*

Times,¹ challenges teams of students from colleges and universities to develop and implement social media programs targeting the narratives and online recruiters of violent extremism.

In 2015, DHS worked with Congress to secure first-of-its kind funding for a CVE Grant Program (CVEGP) that supports communities seeking to do more to combat the ongoing threat of terrorism. My office developed the CVEGP following the FY2016 Omnibus Appropriations bill, signed in December 2015. We became the program office for administering this funding in conjunction with FEMA's Grant Programs Directorate (GPD). OCP reviewed other grant programs both within and outside DHS for best practices to emulate in creating the CVEGP. We consulted closely with FEMA, DHS Financial Assistance Program Office (FAPO), the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and Congress to ensure the program adhered to programmatic standards and met Congressional intent. DHS released the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for the CVEGP on July 6, 2016, less than six months from the original appropriation. DHS is not aware of any other grant program that has more expeditiously opened the application period for a new grant program, and indeed the program has been recognized for its quality, leading other grant programs to consult my office for best practices.

The application period closed on September 6, 2016. Of the 212 complete applications we received by the deadline, my office deemed 197 applications as eligible to proceed for consideration.² The 197 applications requested more than \$100 million in funds and represented 42 states, territories and the District of Columbia, across five focus areas.³ Each individual application received a review and scoring by a panel comprised of four subject matter experts, including an external (i.e. non-federal) expert. The review and scoring process took several weeks. The NOFO instructed the review panel to consider seven criteria to evaluate the strength and merits of each individual application.

Once all the scores were finalized and tabulated into a total score for each application, OCP convened a senior leadership review panel that reviewed the scoring results in each of the five focus areas. The senior leadership review panel also considered optimizing the use of funds, ensuring diversity of applicant type, achieving geographic diversity, avoiding duplication of similar projects, and meeting funding targets by focus area. While preparing a final recommendation memo for consideration by both the Assistant Administrator of FEMA's GPD and my office, FEMA staff with experience working with previous DHS Secretaries on other grant programs recommended that OCP present the Secretary of Homeland Security with several options on how best to allocate the grant funding across the five focus areas. These options were rooted in the recommendations from the senior leadership review.

¹ Nixon, Ron. "Students Are the Newest U.S. Weapon Against Terrorist Recruitment." *New York Times*. 18 July 2017.

² Projects were ruled ineligible if they did not purport to conduct activities eligible under the funding opportunity, such as projects exclusively hosted overseas, or projects that were exclusively research proposals, and projects without a nexus to preventing or intervening into radicalization to violence or recruitment to violent extremism.

³ The FY 2016 CVE Grant Program organizes eligible activities into five focus areas that current research has shown are likely to be most effective in countering violent extremism: (1) developing resilience, (2) training and engaging with community members, (3) managing intervention activities, (4) challenging the narrative, and (5) building capacity of community-level non-profit organizations active in CVE.

Some procedural delays arose before the Secretary made final selections, including the need to conduct security reviews before final selection. OCP established such a process using DHS resources, including those available from the DHS Intelligence & Analysis (I&A) and Customs and Border Protection's National Targeting Center. The DHS vetted application data of potential grantees against the Terrorist Screening Database and other criminal databases based on information provided in the grant applications. While not legally required, the Acting Chief Privacy Officer also ordered a Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) on the security review process. While the PIA provided transparency, it created a delay in providing recommendations to the Secretary. Only applications from non-profit organizations included in recommendations to the Secretary were run through the security review process. Government agencies and institutions of higher education were not included, due to their existing institutional controls that prohibit the misuse of grant funds for the purposes of criminal activity or terrorism.

Ultimately, then-Secretary Johnson made a determination on funding that was a combination of the options presented to him, which was in line with the NOFO and within the Secretary's grant making authority in Section 102(b) of the Homeland Security Act of 2002.⁴ Secretary Johnson publicly announced the selection of intended awardees on January 13, 2017. My office anticipated at least 30 days from the announcement to make all of the formal award offers to allow time for finalizing budgets and other administrative tasks.⁵ Within a few days of the start of the Administration, OCP and FEMA were instructed to continue certain administrative tasks associated with the CVEGP process, but not to make final award offers until the new DHS leadership could review the CVEGP. This was consistent with guidance given to other ongoing grant programs.

The review was comprehensive. New DHS leadership examined the goals of the program, the process, and how the grant program would measure its own efficacy. As a result of the review, and consistent with the authorities granted to the Secretary and outlined in the NOFO, the Department considered three additional factors among the applicant pool, including the applicant or proposal's level of engagement with law enforcement in the community, the proposal's likelihood of effectiveness, and the proposal's level of resource dedication or long-term sustainability. In the end, the application of these factors resulted in some changes to the list of intended awardees. In total, 12 applications announced in January were not offered an award, 7 new applications were offered an award, and 7 applications received increased funding amounts from what was announced in January.

Combined, the 26 projects funded in the CVEGP are designed to make our communities more resistant to terrorist recruitment and radicalization to violence. The Department looks forward to assessing the projects on an ongoing basis to identify best practices and effective tools

⁴ Specifically, the NOFO states that “[t]he results of the senior leadership review will be presented to the Director, Office for Community Partnerships and the Assistant Administrator, FEMA GPD, who will recommend the selection of recipients for this program to the Secretary of Homeland Security. Final funding determinations will be made by the Secretary of Homeland Security, through the FEMA Administrator. The Secretary retains the discretion to consider other factors and information in addition to those included in the recommendations.”

⁵ Notice of Funding Opportunity DHS-16-OCP-132-00-01 Page 5 “Anticipated Funding Selection Date:10/30/2016 Anticipated Award Date: No later than December 1, 2016”

to keep extremists from luring more impressionable people toward violence. The grants support a range of activities, including awareness campaigns, engagement and trust-building, intervention efforts, and direct opposition of terrorist narratives. The awardees span communities across the United States and focus on all forms of violent extremism.

In conclusion, our team recognizes that now comes the hard part. We are excited to see these awards move from application to action, to use proven methods that protect law enforcement and the communities they serve, including sustainable methods to provide benefits, well beyond the grants' end dates. As these programs commence next month, my team is working with all 26 project teams to ensure that the awardees detail their progress towards their goals. The robust performance measures incorporated in these grant projects by the terms of their awards will add to the data on existing programs to help us continually assess which projects have the most success and show the most measurable outcomes. We will share the results from these grants publically so that other communities, the public, and Congress can learn first-hand what works and what does not in terms of terrorism prevention.