

The Honorable Karen H. Gibson
U.S. Senate Sergeant at Arms | Chair, Capitol Police Board
May 19, 2021

Statement for the record before the
U.S. House of Representatives Committee on House Administration
“Reforming the Capitol Police and Improving Accountability for the Capitol Police Board”

Chairperson Lofgren, Ranking Minority Member Davis, members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to discuss how we can work in partnership to reform the United States Capitol Police and improve the practices of the Capitol Police Board.

In my second month as the 42nd Senate Sergeant at Arms, I continue to learn about processes that need improvement or additional resources. I did not seek this position, but I accept my responsibilities gladly. Like many Americans, I was aghast, appalled, and deeply angered by violence at the Capitol on January 6th. I volunteered my services to the House Security Review task force because I wanted to do all in my power to ensure such an assault never happens again. As a member of that security review team, Task Force 1-6, I gained valuable insights into many of the operational and institutional challenges associated with securing the Capitol.

As Senate Sergeant at Arms, my top priority is to work with my partners on the Capitol Police Board and the United States Capitol Police to develop a comprehensive plan to protect the Capitol and its occupants. This plan must not only safeguard the facility, the Members of Congress, and their staffs, but also facilitate constituent visits to lawmakers and ensure that citizens can safely exercise their First Amendment rights. We are guided in this work by the desire to maintain a secure, open campus as reflected by input from congressional stakeholders.

The informed decisions that will be required as part of this comprehensive security plan must be considered in an objective forum free of politics. The current configuration of the Capitol Police Board provides such an environment. The voting membership of the Board, which dates back to 1873, combined with the 2003 addition of the Chief of the Capitol Police as an ex-officio member, is the appropriate structure for advancing the security needs of the legislative branch in an objective, nonpartisan, and bicameral manner.

As we learned from January 6, the former Board’s responsiveness and decision-making processes were not well suited for a crisis. That is why we are working on other means to provide the Chief of Police with additional flexibility to operate in an emergency. For example, at Capitol Police’s request, the Board is considering a regulation that would allow the Chief to appoint D.C. National Guard as Special Police Officers under exigent circumstances without having the Board convene separately to declare an emergency. The Board would then have 48 hours to either confirm or deny the action. Denial by the Board would cease authorization of the D.C. National Guard as Special Police Officers. In addition, we are encouraged by the Capitol

Police's work with law enforcement partners on a Critical Incident Response Force capable of rapid deployment in an emergency.

As Chair, I believe the Board should be responsive, transparent and accountable. Our current day-to-day managerial practice reflects these goals. The 2017 report by the Government Accountability Office that assessed the Board's roles and responsibilities is instructive as the Board collectively evaluates and refines its governance approach and current operational procedures.

I am also focused on increasing the Board's capacity to provide oversight and strategic guidance to the Capitol Police through the work of a dedicated, permanent staff. Unlike Congressional committees with oversight functions, the Capitol Police Board has a single staff member, an executive assistant assigned by the Capitol Police. Staff and counsel for each member augment the Board's work on behalf of their respective principals. This ad-hoc staffing model can slow decision-making given the operational tempo of the respective Board member agencies.

A knowledgeable staff of reasonable size would support the Board in providing strategic direction and needed transformation, based on credible threat intelligence and emerging challenges. At the same time, these professional staff would ensure Capitol Police responsibly use resources to mitigate risk and achieve well-defined physical security and policing objectives, including when planning for known and unforeseen events. The establishment of dedicated, professional staff would also extend the Board's capacity to effectively communicate with the congressional community and external stakeholders, solicit stakeholder feedback, and provide consistent outreach.

Further, the Board's performance would also be improved by developing a Strategic Plan. This document would be used to communicate the Board's priorities, vision, and overarching guidance regarding Capitol security. The Strategic Plan would also delineate concrete objectives to be monitored for implementation and performance. Such a plan would go a long way toward addressing recommendations outlined in the 2017 GAO review of the Capitol Police Board.

I will close by saying how much I appreciate the opportunity to support the men and women of the United States Capitol Police, who have protected the Capitol and its occupants for more than 193 years. As we move forward in developing and implementing our comprehensive plan to secure the Capitol, we will do so in an objective, transparent, bicameral, and nonpartisan manner that balances security and access in support of American democracy.