



**WRITTEN TESTIMONY**

**OF**

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**FOR A HEARING ON**

***“Protecting Our Future: Addressing School Security Challenges in America”***

**BEFORE THE**

**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS, RESPONSE, AND  
COMMUNICATIONS**

**Monday, July 9, 2018**

## **Introduction**

Chairman Donovan, Ranking Member Payne, and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am honored to speak on behalf of the dedicated professionals of the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, who are working tirelessly to ensure the safety and security of the State of New Jersey.

New Jersey faces a complex, diverse, and fluid security environment, with persistent and evolving threats. As you know, New Jersey has the highest population density of any state in the Nation—three times the population density of New York and Pennsylvania—with almost nine million residents in the fourth smallest state by landmass. We average over 1,200 people per square mile, substantially higher than the national average of 92. We have some of the most critical infrastructure in the United States, and we are flanked by two of the largest cities in the country. New Jersey has an undoubtedly unique risk environment.

However, there is no threat more jarring or more important to address than the one to our schools. As we have seen in the appalling attacks in Florida and Texas, the tragic lessons we have learned is that schools are often targets of choice for those who wish to commit horrifying and attention-grabbing acts of violence. New Jersey has more than 600 school districts with the number of schools exceeding 2,500. This number alone, not to mention the number of colleges and universities in the State, presents a vulnerability profile of paramount importance.

On March 26 of this year, Attorney General Grewal updated Directive 2016-7 to explicitly mandate that threats of school violence be sent to the New Jersey Suspicious Activity Reporting System. Accordingly, all school-related threats are reported to our Counterterrorism (CT) Watch located at the Regional Operations and Intelligence Center (ROIC), as well as the County Counterterrorism Coordinators. In partnership with the New Jersey State Police, we work with law enforcement to track and disseminate information regarding possible threats to schools statewide. This collaboration and information sharing strengthens the State's ability to mitigate the possibility of violence against schools.

While some incidents call for an academic discussion to categorize whether they are crime and terror, this is not one of them. The distinction does not matter. The safety of our children is paramount. Regardless of the scope of our individual mission, all of us leading this state have, and will continue, to marshal a full contingent of resources towards protecting our children.

## **NJOHSP Actions**

As we continue our work, we recognize that continual improvement is the only way to succeed. Resting on our laurels will not strengthen security. While we provide details of ongoing efforts, be mindful that we are constantly seeking to improve. The most effective improvement we can take is to, quite simply, work to prevent these incidents from occurring. We recognize that across the country, and here in New Jersey, we must strengthen prevention efforts. Preventing an incident and avoiding the use of response tactics is our goal. As communities, we must embrace a culture of preparedness that invests equally in both prevention and response.

We will continue to prioritize the identification of suspicious activity, mental health indicators, and ensure that there is a clear path for reporting and addressing issues before an incident occurs. We will expand innovative efforts such as suspicious activity reporting training for school bus drivers, custodians, teachers, and administrators.

We will innovate our support for first responders by expanding capabilities to create waves of first preventers. We will continue to take a whole-of-government approach under existing task forces to provide comprehensive active shooter training, including pre-incident indicators and pathways to report those indicators.

Our strategic approach to security also includes supporting and building response capabilities. Our first responder community here in New Jersey is one of the world's best. The New Jersey State Police, Departments of Education, Human Services, Health, Children and Families and many other partners have built response capabilities that are second to none. New Jersey Department of Education has staff embedded with NJOHSP and conducts unannounced school security drills across the state to test both plans and the actions of faculty and staff in a controlled, realistic environment. NJOHSP continues to offer large-scale active shooter exercises for K-12 schools, including facilitating two last year in Bergen and Warren Counties.

We recognize the consistent need to expand security capabilities, focusing on where mass gatherings of people occur, what those common vulnerabilities are, and ensuring that individuals, especially school children, know what to do when circumstances deviate from those they have practiced. To that end, our colleges and universities are participating in a new Mass Gathering Working Group to address these common vulnerabilities and build missing capabilities at locations where students gather throughout the state.

We will continue to ensure that our plans do not just account for the security of the building, but build capabilities that empower the safety of their precious content—our children. We are currently working with the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management, and the New Jersey Department of Health to review every institution of higher education's emergency operations plan, an effort required by New Jersey statute.

We will expand training models and traditional planning assumptions to address changing tactics and enable capabilities to deviate from the plans as situations dictate. We have already begun to transform our thinking and focus on these essential areas. Over the past two years, the State has continually implemented recommendations from the 2015 New Jersey School Security Task Force Report, including:

- The creation of the New Jersey School Safety Specialist Academy and Certification Program;
- Annual security training for public and non-public school employees;
- Additional training and qualifications of Class III Special Law Enforcement Officers at schools and county colleges; and,
- New school construction to incorporate security measures into architectural design.

Subsequently, we have created a School Security Subcommittee on the State's Domestic Security Preparedness Task Force to coordinate horizontally across state agencies, and integrate vertically with national priorities and local needs. Part of that effort includes conducting security assessments at schools, as well as providing assessment training for local enforcement partners who can serve as force multipliers to enhance security capabilities in schools throughout the state.

## **Conclusion**

Unfortunately, attacks on schools are just one facet of a larger security threat to open access public facilities with limited security and free movement. At the moment there remains a need to address concerns and lack of information sharing among mass gathering facilities such as amusement parks, arenas, casinos, colleges and universities, convention centers, stadiums, and any other venues that could be a potential target.

Through efforts such as the aforementioned Mass Gathering Working Group, the Hometown Security Initiative, and our new Secure the Shore Initiative, we are working to protect all of New Jersey from terroristic threats to our public spaces. Work remains, but there are people dedicated to getting it right. We will focus on prevention. We will innovate. We will continue to build those capabilities that are vital to our overall security.

Chairman Donovan, Ranking Member Payne, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. I thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. Under Governor Murphy's leadership, we will continue to adapt to meet the current threat environment and better secure our schools through a whole of government approach. I look forward to your questions, and yield back to the Chairman.