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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

March 29, 2011

The Honorable Janet Napolitano
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable Eric Holder
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Secretary Napolitano and Attorney General Holder:

We are writing to you about your efforts to ensure that federal funds are promoting accurate and effective counterterrorism training for state and local law enforcement and homeland security officials, in the wake of recent reports that some counterterrorism training provided to state and local law enforcement has been inaccurate and even inflammatory.

For the past four years, the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee has investigated the terrorist threat to the homeland posed by violent Islamist extremism. We have held over a dozen hearings and released a staff report reviewing the use of the Internet for radicalization entitled *Violent Islamist Extremism, the Internet and the Homegrown Terrorist Threat* and an investigative report entitled *A Ticking Time Bomb: Counterterrorism Lessons from the U.S. Government's Failure to Prevent the Fort Hood Attack*.

State and local law enforcement and homeland security agencies are our first line of defense against this evolving threat. As part of our inquiry, we held a hearing with local law enforcement agencies that focused on the critical role they play in detecting and preventing another terrorist attack on our homeland. The criticality of state and local law enforcement and homeland security agencies is increasing as the number of terrorism cases rises.

We believe that the federal government must ensure that state and local law enforcement and homeland security officials receive proper training and guidance concerning the nature of our enemy in order to be effective in countering terrorism. Our enemy is clear – it is the ideology of violent Islamist extremism and those individuals who subscribe to it. As our report on the Fort Hood attack found: “America’s enemy today, just as it was seven years ago when the 9/11 Commission released its report, is not simply terrorism or a particular terrorist organization such as al Qaeda or its affiliates. The enemy is in fact the ideology of violent Islamist extremism – the

ideology that inspired the attacks of 9/11 as well as a myriad of attacks large and small around the world prior to and after 9/11.” Describing the threat accurately is essential not just for countering it effectively but also for distinguishing the threat from the peaceful practice of Islam and from the millions of law-abiding and patriotic Muslim Americans.

As a result, we are concerned with recent reports that state and local law enforcement agencies are being trained by individuals who not only do not understand the ideology of violent Islamist extremism but also cast aspersions on a wide swath of ordinary Americans merely because of their religious affiliation. Media reports cite some of these self-appointed counterterrorism training experts as engaging in vitriolic diatribes and making assertions such as “Islam is a highly violent radical religion” and that if someone has “different spellings of a name... That’s probable cause to take them in”¹ These comments, of course, are neither factually accurate nor consistent with our nation’s fundamental values and are not made by adequately trained personnel. It appears, however, that some of these so-called experts have neither the academic nor operational background in the material about which they train.

Preliminary inquiries by our staffs suggest that improper training may not be limited to mere isolated occurrences. We are concerned that at best, the quality of training is inconsistent, and at worst, is actually detrimental to our efforts to confront homegrown terrorism. Muslim Americans are central allies in our fight against violent Islamist extremism, and any training that implies otherwise is both inaccurate and counterproductive to our shared goals.

To assist the Committee’s efforts to understand the oversight of federally supported counterterrorism training for state and local officials, we ask that you provide us with the information requested below.

1. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of Justice (DOJ), through their grant programs, provide much of the federal funding for counterterrorism training for state and local law enforcement and homeland security officials. For your respective Departments, please provide the following information about those grant programs and the training they support:
 - a. A list of all grants programs administered by the Department in the past five fiscal years that has been or can be used to fund counterterrorism training for state and local law enforcement or other officials.
 - b. For each grant program listed in response to paragraph 1, the total funding from that program that was used to fund counterterrorism training for each of the last five fiscal years and the number of individual counterterrorism training programs funded.
 - c. Any guidelines, standards or other requirements that counterterrorism training must meet in order to be a permissible use of grant funds provided by the Department, including any qualifications requirements for instructors.

¹ *Washington Monthly*, “How We Train our Cops to Fear Islam”, March 2011

- d. A description of any other assessment or evaluation procedures used by the Department to determine the adequacy and effectiveness of state and local counterterrorism training supported wholly or in part by Department funding.
2. What additional actions have each of you taken to improve oversight of federally supported counterterrorism training for state and local law enforcement? What additional actions, if any, do you plan to take?

We would appreciate your prompt response to our questions. We look forward to working with you to ensure proper counterterrorism training of our state and local law enforcement and homeland security agencies.

Sincerely,



Senator Joseph I. Lieberman
Chairman



Senator Susan M. Collins
Ranking Member