

**TESTIMONY BEFORE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
TUESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2007**

OPENING COMMENTS

Senator Lieberman and Senator Collins, members of the Committee, good morning and thank you for inviting me here today. My name is James M. Thomas and I am the Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security. I am here to talk to you about the continued implementation of the 9/11 Commission Recommendations. There are three overarching themes that influence my thinking.

- First, I feel strongly that the number one priority for government is, and always should be, public safety. Safety and security are two critical areas that cannot be delegated to anyone but government. With that in mind, the federal government in partnership with the state and local entities share this responsibility. For America to be safe we must all work together, for we are only as strong as the weakest link.
- Second, to date we have focused a great deal on funding and planning for response and recovery. Now we need to focus on funding and planning for prevention and protection. What we really want to do is to prevent another act of terrorism anywhere in this great country.
- And third, when are talking about collaboration, we need to make sure all partners are included: by that I mean local, regional, and state governments, the private sector, and our tribal nations as well as the federal government, who should be leading the way through adequate funding and sharing the very best that technology has to offer as well as always sharing lessons learned.

With these three themes in mind, I would like to address the specific areas of funding, interoperability and information sharing.

FUNDING

I recently heard DHS Undersecretary George Foresman say that we should not judge states by how much grant money they have spent or how fast they have expended it. Instead, success should be judged by the quality of their programs and the extent to which they have supported and improved upon interagency and intergovernmental coordination and collaboration throughout the program development and implementation process in order to achieve a safer community. As a representative of state government, I wholeheartedly support this perspective.

The federal Government should ensure that grant funding streams are flexible enough to accommodate unique needs within each state. States would greatly benefit from an expanded funding approach to all hazards planning, prevention and mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. Federal funding streams must acknowledge that states across the country are in different stages of development. Those states that have well-developed programs need funds to sustain their work. Other states with less robust programs need funding to achieve their initial programmatic goals. All states must be able to address emerging needs that arise in this environment of ever-changing technology and events. If states can justify unique circumstances which require specialized funding, they should be allowed to use federal dollars to address those needs. Again, we must remember that our country is only as strong as the most vulnerable locale, that being a large metropolitan area, a county, or even a rural community where one would least expect the terrorists to train or strike.

Risk-based funding is a laudable and appropriate concept and should be adopted as recommended by the 9/11 Commission. In order to assure consistent data on which the federal agencies will base funding determinations, the federal government should provide one template, or standardized tool, for risk and vulnerability assessment, to be used by each state across the country. Significant progress has been made this year in this area and the states should continue to have an opportunity to provide input in the creation of this tool.

Clearly, high-risk jurisdictions must receive adequate funding to protect their citizens and visitors. Nonetheless, funds should not be targeted exclusively to the immediate geographic areas of high risk, because that will leave surrounding communities extremely vulnerable. For example, a terrorist event in any large city or Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) such New York City will affect several states and jurisdictions. In the example of New York City, both New Jersey and Connecticut as well as other states might be impacted as New York residents and visitors flee the city. Such an event may even require the evacuation of lower Fairfield County in Connecticut and sections of northern New Jersey.

We also must make sure that the large cities and UASI's are safe and secure by taking the necessary steps to keep any potential threat or danger from ever getting into the area. For example, hundreds of thousands of people enter New York City via rail, buses and ferries. We have to make sure that our transportation systems are secure all along the routes leading into the UASI Areas. Again we are only safe and secure when the entire system is working together.

State and local governments must be given the flexibility to apply resources to identified needs and target dollars in a way that is meaningful to every state, regional, and local community. In Connecticut, where we do not have county governments, it is important that the state and municipalities be able to focus on the priorities we have identified, such as the need for greater prevention and protection rather than response and recovery.

All states need to develop or further enhance their public/private partnerships. A small amount of federal funds should be set aside for this purpose. With eighty percent (80%) of federal homeland security funds going to local governments and twenty percent (20%) of funds allocated to the states, there are no funds available to partner with the private sector. Yet the private sector owns about eighty-five percent 85% of the assets in any given state. Federal funds should be made available so that states can share resources with the private sector. That will greatly improve information sharing, collaboration, training, protection and prevention. In return, there must be private sector accountability for such funds.

INTEROPERABILITY

Standardizing systems across the United States would greatly enhance interoperability. In Connecticut, we are working with New York and New Jersey to administer and distribute our federal transit security grant in a manner that is beneficial to all citizens in the tri-state area.

There are other examples of the need for standardization in interoperability. Nationwide, there are hundreds of communication and information systems into which critical information is funneled.

There are still silos around communication systems, which need to be eliminated. In Connecticut, we have tried to address this by bringing people from relevant local and state disciplines together to coordinate and collaborate on issues involving interoperable communications. Planning for and participating in exercises and drills brings all stakeholders to the table and encourages not just the testing of equipment and protocols. It also provides an opportunity for the development of interpersonal relationships and enhanced communications among stakeholders, both of which are vital to successful emergency management.

Also, interoperability needs to expand beyond voice communication, and should include, for example:

- Geographic Information Systems;
- Oblique imagery; and,
- Mobile data terminals in all emergency response vehicles.

Finally, Federal Aviation Administration legislation and homeland security legislation need to be synchronized in the areas of aviation security, port security, and rail security. States need a consistent message from Washington in the areas of transportation policy, planning, and grant funding. For example, perimeter security at airports is just as important as a strong baggage check program. All security starts at the outside boundaries and moves in towards the key assets such as the airport, train station, and other transportation hubs. Ultimately if the outside boundary is not secure neither is the mode to transportation itself.

INFORMATION SHARING

Information sharing is another vital tool in the fields of homeland security and emergency management. As I mentioned earlier, there is a great need to collect information at the local level, pass up to the state level, and on to federal level in a very timely manner. The Homeland Security Information Network (HSIN) should be used by all states. This would allow all states to share vital information.

A Fusion Center, where information that is collected from a variety of local, state, regional and federal sources is subject to shared analysis and dissemination, is a critical component of information sharing. Local communities need the proper funds and technology to accomplish this goal. We need to have a Fusion Center in all of the 50 states, and the territories of the United States. They need to be linked both regionally and then to the DHS National Security Center and be capable of sharing critical information in “real time” as needed.

There is also a need to review and revamp the current classification criteria within the intelligence community. Much of the information that is now deemed “classified” should be reclassified as “for official use only”, so that it can be shared with those who need it (state and local law enforcement officers; emergency management personnel; emergency preparedness planners.)

Information sharing should be expanded with the notion that the public is a partner with government, and if well informed, can serve as the eyes and ears for protection and prevention. Again, we need the help of the general public. There never will be enough of police officers, FBI Agents, and other law enforcement personnel to do the job without the assistance of the public. We need to have a strong, sustained public education campaign that engages and challenges the people of our great country to not be complacent. We need each and every one of us to be involved if we are truly going to be effective in the area of Homeland Security.

We are concerned more than ever that because of 9/11 our lives as we once knew them has changed. We need to implement the recommendations of the 9/11 commission as soon as possible. Again, I say to you -- It is the responsibility of the government; federal, state, local and tribal to provide for a safe place for all of us to live. We need to work together like we have never worked before. Check the ego's in at the door – Do the right thing. – Let us make the United States a safer and better place to live. Let us move on the implementation of the 9/11 Commission recommendations this session!

Again, thank you for giving me an opportunity to share my thoughts with you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.