

**Chairman Peters Opening Statement As Prepared for Delivery**  
**Full Committee Hearing: Addressing Weapons of Mass Destruction and Health Security**  
**Threats to the Homeland**  
**July 19, 2022**

Thank you to our witnesses for joining us and for your continued service to the American people. Today's hearing will examine our nation's readiness to respond to weapons of mass destruction and health security threats.

The goal of this hearing is to assess the Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction office, housed within DHS, and its ability to combat these threats. We will also discuss the newly established Office of Health Security, which will be tasked with streamlining the health and safety operations of department personnel and overseeing medical and public health matters across DHS.

Chemical, biological, nuclear, and radiological materials, sometimes shortened to CBRN, is an umbrella term to describe hazardous agents that can be weaponized, and can cause everything from mass casualties and incapacitation to agricultural destruction.

For example, in April 2019, a technician was arrested after stealing three radioactive devices from his workplace in Arizona. According to a court filing, the technician intended to release the radioactive materials at a shopping mall but local police and the FBI arrested him before he could do so.

Similarly, biological weapons, such as anthrax and ricin, have been used by terrorists in attempted attacks against civilians, including elected officials.

As technology has advanced, the threats posed by these weapons only continue to grow and give malicious actors more opportunities to cause significant harm.

The Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction office was established to detect, mitigate, and deter these significant national security threats.

Initially, the office faced serious setbacks after its creation, including unsteady leadership, low morale, and high staff turnover, among other challenges.

Despite these initial setbacks, we have recently seen promising signs of the office's improvement, including better morale and positive feedback from stakeholders, indicated by recent GAO report.

I remain optimistic that forthcoming structural changes in the office and increased coordination between law enforcement and state, local, tribal, and territorial partners, will drastically bolster the office's ability to tackle these challenges head-on.

Last month, Ranking Member Portman and I, introduced bipartisan legislation to significantly enhance the federal government's ability to detect, recognize, and evaluate chemical, biological, radioactive, and nuclear threats.

The *Offices of Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction and Health Security Act*, reauthorizes the CWMD office, which is set to expire next year, and authorizes the new Office of Health Security.

Our bipartisan legislation more clearly defines the CWMD office's responsibilities, eliminating ineffective or duplicative functions, institutes a number of accountability and oversight measures, and appoints the Chief Medical Officer to lead the Office of Health Security, serving a dual appointment as the Assistant Secretary for Health Security and reporting to the Secretary of DHS.

All of these changes will ensure our nation can develop a comprehensive national strategy to protect all of our communities from these dangerous materials and public health threats that can have catastrophic effects.

In addition to strengthening our homeland security and preparedness, these changes will also make these offices more accountable to Congress and the American people.

Today I am pleased to welcome a panel of expert witnesses who can discuss whether DHS is equipped with the necessary tools and resources to prevent possible attacks and ensure our nation is prepared to respond to and recover from them. I look forward to a comprehensive and insightful discussion.