

**Chairman Peters Opening Statement As Prepared for Delivery**  
**Full Committee Hearing: Examining the Threat to Houses of Worship and Public Spaces**  
**March 16, 2022**

In recent years, we have seen an unacceptable number of violent threats, and deadly attacks, on some of our most vulnerable public spaces in communities across the country.

These targets have included spaces where Americans are going about their daily lives, and where they should have no reason to fear for their safety. Places like shopping centers, entertainment venues, schools, and frequently, houses of worship, including synagogues, churches, and mosques.

Last month, a man attempted to start a fire at the Al-Huda Islamic Center in Dearborn, Michigan. And just a few weeks before that, an armed British citizen held hostages for 11 hours at Congregation Beth Israel, a synagogue in Colleyville, Texas.

These are just two recent incidents after years and years of attacks, from attempted arsons to deadly shootings, at synagogues, African American churches, mosques and gurdwaras across our nation.

These insidious, hateful attacks not only take lives and cause physical injuries, they also destroy sacred property and leave deep traumatic scars on entire communities.

Everyone across this nation deserves to feel safe where they live, work, and pray.

That is why resources, like those provided by the Department of Homeland Security's Nonprofit Security Grant Program, are so important to keeping our communities safe and secure from these attacks.

This program provides grants to faith-based and nonprofit organizations to help secure their facilities, and fund training and resources to protect congregations from these threats.

I have long fought to increase the resources available to nonprofits and houses of worship who are looking to strengthen their security, and I was proud to work alongside Senator Portman last Congress to lead the authorization of this vital program. I look forward to continuing our work together to strengthen and expand the resources available for this high-demand program, to ensure we are effectively meeting the needs of our religious communities.

Although this important program is available to many organizations, it is all too clear that the evolving threats to our homeland security are targeting many other public spaces.

We have seen pervasive threats, and devastating attacks, wherever people gather, from the Pulse night club attack to the shooting at the Walmart in El Paso, Texas, and more recently during the nationwide bomb threats targeting Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

These diffuse and rising threats raise serious questions about the rapidly evolving landscape of homeland security threats that communities across the country are facing, and how federal agencies can better address them to protect Americans as they go about their daily lives.

Increasingly, lone offenders and small cells, who are often motivated by personal grievances, or ideological beliefs, present the most lethal threat to the homeland.

Many of them are radicalized online, through conspiracies, misinformation, and disinformation that merge to create a volatile environment and the potential for real-world violence.

To effectively address these threats, we rely on the FBI and DHS components, including FEMA and the Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, as well as state and local partners, to respond and disseminate information to our communities to better protect people.

I look forward to today's discussion about what more Congress and our national security agencies can do to tackle this rapidly shifting threat environment and keep all Americans safe.

Now, I will recognize Ranking Member Portman for his opening remarks.