

**Opening Statement [as prepared]
Ranking Member Rob Portman
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Hearing:
“Addressing Weapons of Mass Destruction and Health Security Threats to the
Homeland”
Tuesday, July 19, 2022**

“Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Dr. Sherman, thank you for the work you've done on this, and in particular, some of the concerns you have raised, which we'll go over again today, we did in our last hearing. And Chairman Peters, thank you for holding this hearing and more importantly, for your work on this issue and our work together to try to come up with legislation that deals with some of the concerns that have been raised.

“Combating these WMD threats is very complex. They can be naturally occurring, accidental, and certainly human-made. The Department of Homeland Security's Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Office, the CWMD, we just talked about, has a critical role in our nation's ability to detect, to prevent, and to safeguard the American people from these threats. In addition to developing and implementing counter WMD capability, CWMD is responsible for coordinating of course with federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial partners to ensure that they have the expertise and the tools needed to detect and prevent threats.

“In our February Committee hearing, which was called “Addressing the Gaps in America's Biosecurity Preparedness,” members of this Committee heard from the witnesses and the panel a lot of concerns about the CWMD office, ranging from employee morale, as we just talked about, to effectiveness of programs such as BioWatch. These findings are concerning, and the purpose of today's hearing is to discuss how to address these issues as part of the CWMD reauthorization.

“To that end, we did introduce legislation, Senator Peters and myself, that will reauthorize and strengthen the CWMD office with updated requirements, standards, and accountability measures to address these concerns and more importantly, to ensure our country is properly safeguarded from chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear threats. Legislation by the way also authorizes the DHS Chief Medical Officer as the head of the new Office of Health Security. DHS has made some news on that in the last 24 hours. This change will bolster oversight efforts of all medical, public health, and workforce safety of the Department, while also performing a pivotal role in all health matters relating to DHS's broad mission set.

“So I look forward to discussing the strategic vision of this new Office of Health Security and actions that we'll take to coordinate with CWMD on WMD health matters and want to make sure that we're lining up well with the authorization, the reauthorization, and the actions that the Department has taken over the last 24 hours.

“The authorities of the CWMD office are set to expire late next year. And again, as this Committee considers reauthorization legislation that we've introduced, I look forward to hearing all the witnesses' assessment, as we just did, on the current WMD threat landscape, and how our bipartisan legislation will help strengthen our nation's level of preparedness. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.”