

**Chairman Peters Opening Statement As Prepared for Delivery**  
**Full Committee Hearing: Protecting the Homeland from Unmanned Aircraft Systems**  
**July 14, 2022**

I'd like to thank our witnesses for joining us and for their continued service to the American people. Today's hearing will highlight the threat posed by unmanned aircraft systems, or UAS, commonly known as drones, and discuss how federal agencies are working together to combat this evolving threat.

We will also examine what additional authorities and resources the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Justice, need to successfully counter UAS, while working together with the Federal Aviation Administration.

In recent years, the market for commercial UAS has rapidly expanded due to the affordability and utility of drones that are readily accessible to government, industry, and recreational users.

The FAA estimates that by 2024, about 2.3 million UAS, including 1.5 million recreational drones and model aircraft, and about 800,000 commercial UAS, will be registered to fly in U.S. airspace. Between 2016 and 2019, airline pilots reported, on average, more than 100 drone sightings per month to the FAA.

The increase in the number of UAS operating in our air space creates a higher risk of rogue drones either failing to obey safety rules or operating with nefarious intentions, threatening manned aircraft operations, airports, critical infrastructure facilities, and high-profile, widely-attended events such as sporting events, concerts, and more.

While most individuals operate their drones responsibly, we have already seen careless and malicious actors misuse these technologies to engage in reckless or criminal activities.

In September 2017, a privately operated drone in Brooklyn, New York, was intentionally flown beyond the operator's line of sight and collided with a U.S. Army Black Hawk helicopter patrolling a temporary no-fly zone around New York City.

Thankfully, the Black Hawk and its crew landed safely, but there was significant damage to the helicopter, and the incident created an unacceptable risk to the servicemembers.

In 2019, a drone significantly disrupted flight operations at Newark Liberty Airport for 90 minutes, causing 9 flights to be diverted, halting 43 planes inbound to the airport, and causing significant delays for passengers.

These events demonstrate the severity of the threat posed by UAS. If we do not act, it could only be a matter of time before someone who is recklessly operating this technology causes an accident that has catastrophic effects.

And as we work to avoid unintentional disasters, we must also account for the escalating threat of weaponized drones from terrorist and criminal organizations who could launch domestic drone attacks on mass gatherings, high-profile landmarks and buildings, or federal property. This includes foreign adversaries, who have deployed drones in conflicts abroad, and could have the capability to deploy them in the United States as well.

We must also be prepared to counter drones operated by criminal organizations that are reportedly using UAS for illegal activities including trafficking illicit drugs across our borders.

I am grateful to my colleagues who have led past efforts to address these concerns and improve the safe integration of UAS into American airspace, including Senator Johnson for authoring *the Preventing Emerging Threats Act*.

Since 2018, the authorities created by this law have bolstered our nation's ability to protect numerous large public events, including the Super Bowl, from UAS threats.

Today's hearing is an opportunity to discuss renewing and updating those authorities, which are set to expire in October, as well as the Biden Administration's Domestic Counter-UAS National Action Plan, the first coordinated, whole of government plan to address the evolving security threats posed by UAS. I'm working on bipartisan legislation that I plan to introduce in the coming weeks to reauthorize and strengthen counter-UAS authorities to better tackle this threat.

Today I am pleased we have a panel of expert witnesses from DHS, DOJ, and the FAA who can discuss what lawmakers can do to ensure the federal government is better equipped to safeguard against potential threats from UAS.