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U.S. Department of Homeland Security**

**U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations**

**Hearing: ISIS Online: Countering Terrorist Radicalization and Recruitment on the
Internet and Social Media**

July 6, 2016

Chairman Portman, Ranking Member McCaskill, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to be here. I welcome the opportunity to appear before you to discuss priorities and key actions of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to address ISIL and other terrorist's attempts at online recruitment and radicalization to violence.

Overview of Threat

In recent years, the threat from violent extremism has evolved. Terrorists at home and abroad are attempting to radicalize and recruit individuals to violence within the United States. As Secretary Johnson has said, we are in a new phase in the global terrorist threat. We have moved from a world of terrorist-directed attacks to a world that increasingly includes the threat of terrorist-inspired attacks, one in which the attacker may never have come face-to-face with a member of a terrorist organization and instead lives among us and radicalizes to violence, inspired perhaps by messages and propaganda ISIL and other groups disseminate through social media. By their nature, such inspired attacks are harder for intelligence and law enforcement to detect and could occur with little or no notice, presenting a more complex security challenge.

We are concerned about attempts by ISIL and other groups to inspire lone offenders. For example, ISIL consistently releases high-quality English-language videos and magazines promoting its alleged caliphate and calling for supporters in the West to pursue attacks in their homelands.

We were forcefully reminded of this on the morning of June 12, when over 300 individuals were terrorized in an Orlando night club by a man who shot and killed 49 individuals and injured 53 more. We believe he may have been inspired in part by terrorist organizations overseas, resulting in the worst act of terrorism in the U.S. since 9/11 and the worst mass shooting in U.S. history.

Development of CVE

Over the past several years, the U.S. government has acknowledged the need to go beyond traditional counterterrorism and law enforcement approaches to address the evolving threat from homegrown violent extremists and develop more comprehensive efforts aimed at addressing root causes to prevent the next generation of recruits.

This recognition has led to the prioritization of a prevention framework, known to many as Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). Whereas “counterterrorism” implies attempting to stop an individual who, in the eyes of the law, has already taken steps toward committing a terrorist act or joining a terrorist group using law enforcement, screening and protection activities, CVE counters the violent extremist recruitment, focusing on the root causes of many underlying motivations, and working to prevent those drivers, or provide “off-ramps” for individuals who may have taken steps toward embracing violent extremism. CVE encompasses a number of efforts, including prevention and intervention programming, as well as alternative dispositions which involves the possible development of disengagement programs in the post-crime context, both prior to trial and following conviction.

Our federal approach to CVE is described in the 2011 White House *National Strategy for Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States*, and is outlined in the subsequent *Strategic Implementation Plan for Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States*.

Since 2012, the federal government has collectively held thousands of community engagements in cities around the country. These include, but are not limited to, Community Engagement Roundtables which have been hosted by the DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties since 2005, Town Hall Meetings, Community Awareness Briefings and Community Resilience Exercises. I personally led our engagement efforts in Detroit and Dearborn, Michigan, and several other cities from 2006 to 2012. In addition, Office for Community Partnerships (OCP) field staff provide on-the-ground strategic engagement, outreach, logistical, training, and CVE subject matter expert support to the southern CA and Denver regions.

In February 2015, the White House convened a three-day summit on CVE to bring local leaders together and discuss concrete steps to enhance support for community-led efforts. The White House CVE Summit showcased prevention frameworks that Boston, Los Angeles and Minneapolis developed, through programs and initiatives tailored to their local communities. These cities continue to advance local efforts, such as through engagement with mental health professionals, community outreach programs, and countering the message of violent extremist groups.

Taking our CVE Efforts to the Next Level

Recognizing the need to respond to the emerging threats, in 2015 Secretary Johnson announced an Office for Community Partnerships. This Office is dedicated to focusing the Department’s efforts in countering violent extremism and works to build relationships and promote trust with local communities across the United States.

We are focused on partnering with and empowering communities by providing them a wide range of resources to use in countering violent extremism. In addition, we are partnering with the private sector to find innovative, community-based approaches to countering violent extremism in social media.

Advancing that effort also means working in a unified and coordinated way across the U.S. government, which is the purpose of the interagency CVE Task Force, announced in January 2016 and which is responsible for organizing all CVE efforts across the federal government.

The Task Force is hosted and currently led by DHS, and the leadership will rotate every two years between a DHS and a Department of Justice (DOJ) executive. The Task Force includes participation from over 10 departments and agencies across the federal government. Its major objectives include developing intervention programs; synchronizing federal CVE outreach and engagement; managing CVE communications and leveraging digital technologies to engage, empower, and connect CVE stakeholders; and coordinating and prioritizing federal CVE research and establishing feedback mechanisms to increase the relevance of CVE findings. Ensuring that the nation's CVE efforts are sufficiently resourced has been an integral part of our overall efforts.

Countering Online Recruitment and Radicalization to Violence

As terrorist groups such as ISIL continue to undertake a deliberate strategy of using social media to reach into our country and recruit, radicalize, and mobilize some of those among us to violence, engagement with the private sector on this issue has become critically important.

Various departments and agencies have long engaged with a range of key technology companies to encourage efforts to counter ISIL and other groups online, and we have recently stepped up government efforts. For example, Secretary Johnson, Attorney General Lynch, and other senior Administration officials met with social media executives in San Francisco in January 2016, and with tech leaders in New York in November 2015. DHS OCP and DOJ staff engaged with the technology industry representatives during a meeting in February 2016; the goal of the meeting was to build on a dialogue with the social media industry to determine how best to build partnerships to address use of the Internet for terrorist purposes.

As part of supporting efforts to counter extremism online, the Department supports the Peer-2-Peer (P2P) Challenging Extremism contests. P2P is a government-sponsored competition, launched in 2015, to empower universities to develop innovative and powerful social media campaigns that include positive, alternative, or counter narratives to counter violent extremism. Student teams work with a faculty advisor, while earning academic credit, to research, design, and launch a real social media campaign that has measurable impact on their campus, community and country. Since its inception in spring 2015, over 3,000 students representing 125 university teams from over 30 countries have participated in this unique program.

Facebook became the first technology partner to join the P2P project in the summer of 2015. As part of the partnership, Facebook sponsors a competition of the top three teams who demonstrate the best integration of the Facebook platform into their broader digital and social media campaigns at the Facebook Global Digital Challenge event. Facebook also provides advertisement credits on the Facebook platform to each of the teams during the competition. Facebook's participation has also allowed the initiative to expand into more international schools.

On June 27, the State Department, one of our partners in this initiative, hosted its third P2P competition with teams competing as finalists from Azerbaijan, Belgium, as well as the Rochester Institute of Technology in New York. And on June 28, Facebook hosted their P2P Global Digital Challenge, with teams from Belgium, Afghanistan, Spain and the Netherlands.

Through the P2P Program, we have seen that young people are essential to our work in creating credible and positive messages that counter violent extremism and hate. That is why, for example, DHS is currently working with partners across the government to scale up domestic student-designed campaigns and projects. This will require additional funding, as well as support from government, non-government organizations, and private sector partners to transition viable student projects to market.

At the Department, we are aware that there is a limit to the effectiveness of government efforts with regard to countering terrorist recruitment and radicalization to violence, particularly in the online realm, and those local communities online and offline must address these issues since they are best positioned to intervene. Consequently, we at DHS can act as a facilitator, connector, and convener, but ultimately, communities and individuals are best positioned to take action to counter violent extremism.

That is why the Department focuses on cultivating and empowering partners – particularly those in civil society and the private sector – to develop and amplify content that resonates against ISIL, al-Qaida, and other violent extremist groups.

In addition to supporting the P2P Program, the CVE Task Force includes a team dedicated to communications and digital strategy. The Task Force will build partnerships with the private sector to identify and amplify credible voices to counter narratives promoted by ISIL, domestic terrorists, and other violent extremists. This will include a multi-platform communications strategy that leverages the use of digital technologies to engage, empower, and connect CVE stakeholders.

Ultimately, the Department and the Administration believe that the innovative private sector that created so many technologies our society enjoys today can also help create tools to limit terrorists from using these technologies for terrorist recruitment and radicalization to violence; ways their creators never intended. We applaud and are encouraged by companies' increasing efforts to address the tiny fraction of their users exploiting their technologies for nefarious ends. In addition, we recognize the critical role that private sector and NGO groups can play in continuing their efforts to develop creative and effective solutions to counter how terrorists use media platforms for these purposes. Going forward, we will continue to convene a wide range of disciplines, including civil society, technology companies, and content producers. We are encouraged by a number of initiatives underway and applaud those who see the common challenge terrorism poses and are continuing to take proactive steps to make it harder for terrorists operate.

Moving Forward

Our efforts to develop a locally-driven, comprehensive prevention-based CVE framework remain ongoing. We have taken great strides over recent months to professionalize and institutionalize the CVE infrastructure of the Department and the U.S. Government as a whole. However, more work remains.

Recently, Congress appropriated CVE funds in the FY 2016 Omnibus Appropriations Act, which allocated \$10 million in CVE grant funding to be administered jointly by OCP and FEMA. This is the first time federal funding at this level will be provided, on a competitive basis, specifically to support local CVE efforts. The funding will be competitively awarded to state, tribal, and local governments, nonprofit organizations, and institutions of higher education to support new and existing community-based efforts to counter violent extremist recruitment and radicalization to violence. We look forward to receiving applications for this funding opportunity and will continue to update Congress as the program moves forward.

Conclusion

As recent events have tragically demonstrated, the radicalization and recruitment to violence of American citizens perpetrated by ISIL and other terrorist organizations remains a real and persistent threat. As such, the CVE efforts undertaken by both the Department and the CVE Task Force are paramount to address one of the most significant homeland security challenges facing the nation.

Chairman Portman, Ranking Member McCaskill, and Members of the Subcommittee, this is the vision we are working to implement today, not only digital engagement but also through the important work of building a comprehensive CVE model that ensures safe and resilient communities in the homeland. Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to appear before you today on this critical issue. I look forward to answering your questions.