



STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

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BEFORE

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ON

*“Violent Extremism and Terrorism:
Examining the Threat to Houses of Worship and Public Spaces”*

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Good morning, Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Portman, and Senators. We appreciate the opportunity to testify about the role of the Department in protecting houses of worship and other public spaces.

Threat Environment

The United States remains in a heightened threat environment fueled by several factors, including an online environment filled with false or misleading narratives and conspiracy theories, and other forms of mis- dis- and mal-information (MDM) introduced and/or amplified by foreign and domestic threat actors. These threat actors seek to exacerbate societal friction to sow discord and undermine public trust in government institutions to encourage unrest, which could potentially inspire acts of violence. Mass casualty attacks and other acts of targeted violence conducted by lone offenders and small cells acting in furtherance of ideological beliefs and/or personal grievances pose an ongoing threat to the nation. While the conditions underlying the heightened threat landscape have not significantly changed over the last year, the convergence of the following factors has increased the volatility, unpredictability, and complexity of the threat environment: (1) the proliferation of false or misleading narratives, which sow discord or undermine public trust in U.S. government institutions; (2) continued calls for violence directed at U.S. critical infrastructure; soft targets and mass gatherings; faith-based institutions, such as churches, synagogues, and mosques; institutions of higher education; racial and religious minorities; government facilities and personnel, including law enforcement and the military; the media; and perceived ideological opponents; and (3) calls by foreign terrorist organizations for attacks on the United States based on recent events. The recent Colleyville hostage situation marks a divergence in the type of activity we have seen surrounding faith-based institutions over the past several years from these actors, in that the threat actor traveled from another country, held congregants hostage, and attempted to use the hostage situation as leverage to release a federally convicted felon.

Domestic Violent Extremism (DVE)

A review of DHS information on domestic violent extremist (DVE) attacks and plots in the United States since 2010 reveals at least 30 likely ideologically-motivated attacks or attempted attacks targeting mosques, synagogues, churches and other religious centers and facilities and members of faith-based communities based on their actual or perceived religious affiliation. These attacks or attempted attacks were committed by DVEs with a variety of motivations including racial or ethnic grievances, anti-government or anti-authority grievances, and other personalized grievances. The most common weapons DVEs used in these attacks or plots were arson, which was followed closely by the use of firearms. The use of arson, in particular, is more common in the targeting of faith-based communities compared to other targets DVEs pursued during this time period. In addition, at least 22 of the plots and attacks involved lone offenders mobilizing instead of large groups. This trend is similar to DVEs overall mobilization patterns, as lone offender attacks are more frequent than large group attacks against a wide array of targets in the Homeland, which highlights how lone offenders or small cells motivated by various terrorist ideologies represent the most persistent and lethal terrorism-related threat facing the United States today.

Homegrown Violent Extremism (HVE)

Most attacks against faith-based institutions have been by domestic violent extremists (DVE); however, individuals inspired to act by foreign terrorist organizations, also known as homegrown violent extremists (HVEs), have also targeted faith-based institutions. Since 2018 there have been plots disrupted by law enforcement before they could occur that were inspired by ISIS. In June 2019, an individual plotted to bomb a church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in support of the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham (ISIS) and to inspire other ISIS supporters in the United States. Over the course of several months, the individual bought materials to assemble a bomb and used mapping applications to surveil his target. The individual was arrested by the FBI before he could carry out the attack. In addition, in December 2018 an individual plotted a mass shooting of at a synagogue in Toledo, Ohio, in support of ISIS. The individual surveilled and researched when the Jewish sabbath was so that more people would be present during his planned attack and pulled up photographs of the inside of the synagogue. The individual was arrested by the FBI before he could carry out his attack.

DHS Resources Provided to Faith-Based Organizations

DHS is committed to supporting efforts to maintain safe and secure houses of worship and related facilities while sustaining an open and welcoming environment. Through intelligence and information sharing, development of best practices and guidance, vulnerability assessments, training, and financial resources, DHS provides resources that assist in securing houses of worship. In our steady state operations, DHS provides resources and trainings on protecting places of worship, including: threat assessments, identifying and managing potential threats, “The Power of Hello” program created for places of worship; and the nationwide Protective Security Advisor (PSA) program, which includes a cadre of security experts available to assist with infrastructure security and vulnerability mitigation. In the wake of Colleyville, the Department is actively working to broadening the number, content, availability, and navigability of resources to educate faith-based organizations on issues of security and provide them the resources they need.

FEMA Preparedness Grant Programs

FEMA’s Preparedness Grant Programs address the Nation’s immediate security needs, enhance public safety, protect lives and property, and support the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2003, Congress has appropriated and DHS has provided more than \$56 billion in preparedness grant funding to state, local, tribal, and territorial governments, the owners and operators of critical transportation infrastructure, nonprofit organizations, and other community organizations. In Fiscal Year 2021 alone, DHS awarded approximately \$2 billion in preparedness grant funds across nine grant programs to state, local, tribal, and territorial governments, as well as owners and operators of critical transportation infrastructure, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector, to improve the Nation’s readiness in preventing, preparing for, protecting against, responding to, and recovering from terrorist attacks and other hazards.

Of particular importance to places of worship, the Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NSGP) provides funding for target hardening and other enhancements and activities to nonprofit organizations that are at a high risk of terrorist attack. In addition to NSGP, DHS has made enhancing the protection of soft targets and crowded places a priority under the Homeland Security Grant Program, the Tribal Homeland Security Grant Program, and the Transit Security Grant Program. In total, these programs, discussed in more detail below, provided more than \$1.2 billion to state, local, tribal, and territorial governments, transportation authorities, and other community organizations in FY 2021. The Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention Program (TVTP), managed by DHS's Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships, also awarded \$20 million in FY 2021 funds to enhance the capabilities of local communities to prevent targeted violence and terrorism.

The recent hostage situation at the Congregation Beth Israel synagogue in Colleyville, Texas, underscores the importance of these programs, especially the NSGP, in protecting houses of worship and public spaces from terrorists and domestic violent extremists. Congregation Beth Israel received a \$100,000 NSGP grant award in 2020 that enable the synagogue to advance overall security.

Nonprofit Security Grant Program

From FY 2007 through FY 2021, FEMA awarded approximately \$594 million in NSGP funds to some 6,500 nonprofit organizations at high risk of a terrorist attack. This competitive grant program provides up to \$150,000 to nonprofit organizations for a single location, or up to \$450,000 for a maximum of three locations, for training and physical security enhancements, including contract security, fencing, surveillance systems, access control systems, and lighting. The program is also intended to promote coordination and collaboration in emergency preparedness activities among public and private community representatives and with state and local government agencies. Secretary Mayorkas recognizes the importance of this program to houses of worship and other nonprofit organizations.

As part of our efforts to ensure that all nonprofit organizations in need of security resources have access to this funding, and in support of Executive Order 13985: Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government, FEMA is conducting extensive outreach to underserved and marginalized communities to provide information and technical assistance in preparation for the upcoming FY 2022 application period. In addition, we are identifying and mitigating barriers to program participation, such as awareness of the program, ease of application, eligibility, and qualification requirements. The analysis will also illuminate where the grant program has not historically been awarded and enable us to more effectively address the security and needs of underserved and historically marginalized communities.

Homeland Security Grant Program

The Homeland Security Grant Program (HSGP) helps state, local, tribal, and territorial governments build capacity to prevent, protect against, and respond to acts of terrorism. The program provided \$1.12 billion to 56 states and territories and to 31 high-risk urban areas in FY 2021.

HSGP recipients have regularly used the funding to protect soft targets and crowded places to enhance community resilience; in FY 2021, HSGP recipients completed requirements to spend at least 5 percent of their funds on projects that protect soft targets and crowded places. Funding also improved activities and communications with owners and operators of entertainment venues, shopping centers, large office buildings, and similar locations to provide information on preparedness and response activities, threats facing soft targets/crowded places, and available resources to enhance performance community resilience. Recipients also used funds to partner with critical infrastructure owners to help them evaluate their protective measures, identify vulnerabilities, and develop security plans.

Based on analysis of FY 2018 – FY 2020 HSGP grant awards, approximately \$38 million was sub-awarded to colleges and universities to address their security needs as potential soft targets.

Transit Security Grant Program

DHS also recognizes the vulnerabilities of our public transportation systems on which so many Americans rely. The Transit Security Grant Program (TSGP) provides funding to enhance physical security for transit systems and provides funding for “on the ground” law enforcement patrols specifically targeting potential terrorist activity prevention. TSGP funds are awarded on a competitive basis directly to the Nation’s highest-risk transit systems. TSGP applicants also receive additional consideration for project proposals that enhance the protection of soft targets and crowded places. In FY 2021, the TSGP provided \$88 million to 23 public transit systems.

Since FY 2006, more than \$1 billion in TSGP funds have been awarded to multi-modal/high-density transit stations to physically harden these high-traffic facilities against potential terrorist attacks. The funds also support specialized operational teams, including K-9 units, mobile explosive-detection screening teams, and physical deterrence to would-be attackers.

DHS Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships

The DHS Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships (DHS Center) carries out the policies and program priorities of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships and DHS related to all-hazards preparedness and mitigation, emergency and disaster response and recovery, and combating human trafficking.

Originally established in 2006, the DHS Center has focused on the vital role faith-based and community leaders play in emergency management and safety and security. The DHS Center collaborates with our federal interagency partners through research, outreach, and building relationships and capacity across a diverse network of faith-based and community leaders, state, local, tribal, and territorial governments, our first responders, and partners from the private sector.

The DHS Center also provides opportunities for listening and learning from faith-based and community leaders and local first responders. The dialogue focuses on what works at the local level and where the federal government could be more helpful in communication, capacity-building, and as partners to reaffirm our commitment to safeguard faith communities and persons at risk of discrimination, harassment, and hate-based acts of violence and vandalism.

The top priority of the DHS Center is to support and bolster a whole of government and whole community approach to increasing the safety and security of places of worship and community spaces. In 2021 alone, the DHS Center partnered across the federal family to reach more than 6,000 faith-based and community leaders.

One example of national-level engagement occurred in August 2021 on the topic, “Preventing Targeted Violence and Protecting the Safety and Security of Houses of Worship,” where the DHS Center featured the voices and perspectives of a wide variety of faith-based leaders. More than 2,000 registrants participated in this engagement to provide multi-faith perspectives on steps to improve facility safety and security measures and in the many spaces where people meet alongside local first responders. In addition to these perspectives, the DHS Center moderated discussion alongside federal colleagues from the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice to ensure participants received actionable and practical responses to their questions, including how to apply for Nonprofit Security Program Grants. Additionally, the DHS Center, in partnership with other components, continues to facilitate timely outreach and invitations to faith-based, community, and nonprofit organizations to participate in technical assistance webinars for the FY2022 NSGP cycle.

The DHS Center remains focused on working with communities of diverse faiths, backgrounds, and experiences to prevent, respond to, and be resilient against such acts of violence, whether they are spurred by ideologies of hate, false narratives, or otherwise.

Conclusion

The recent hostage situation in Colleyville, Texas, at Congregation Beth Israel reminds us of the value of DHS programs dedicated to protecting houses of worship and other public spaces and is a call to action to redouble our efforts.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We look forward to answering any questions you may have.