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Testimony before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs: The Boston Marathon Bombings

Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Coburn, and members of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs:

My name is Kurt Schwartz and I serve in Governor Patrick's administration as the Undersecretary for Homeland Security and Homeland Security Advisor, and the Director of the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency. On behalf of Governor Patrick, I thank you for this opportunity to share thoughts and insights as you look at the initial lessons learned from the public safety response to the Boston Marathon bombings. As you know, these events began with the terrorist bombings on April 15th during the Boston Marathon that killed three people and injured hundreds, and continued through April 18th and 19th when one police officer was shot and killed and another seriously injured before one of the suspected terrorists was killed during a shootout with law enforcement officers and the other was captured after a day-long manhunt.

The response to the events surrounding the Boston Marathon once again demonstrated the value of our investments of money, time and resources in local, state and federal homeland security since 2001. Within seconds of the bomb blasts at the finish line of the Boston Marathon, an array of personnel, resources and capabilities - many funded with federal homeland security grant dollars - were brought to bear to triage and care for the wounded, communicate with the public, provide situational awareness for decision makers, ensure the safety and security of the public and critical infrastructure, set up a joint command center, and ultimately identify and apprehend the suspected terrorists.

As the world watched, first responders, aided by the public, swiftly provided on-scene emergency medical care to those injured from the blasts, and emergency medical services (EMS) partners followed established plans to triage and transport the wounded to area trauma centers. And even as the wounded were being evaluated, treated and transported, tactical and other specialized teams, many of which deployed into Boston under established mutual aid

agreements, conducted chemical, biological, radioactive and nuclear (CBRN) monitoring in the area, searched for additional explosive devices, deployed to and secured our regional transit systems and other critical infrastructure, and established a large security zone and crime scene perimeter. The speed with which Boston, supported by the Massachusetts State Police, the National Guard, the Transit Police and dozens of local, regional, state and federal law enforcement agencies and other first responders, evacuated the wounded to hospitals, took control of the crime scene, established a large security perimeter, and established communication with the public, is a testament to homeland security spending and investments in preparedness, training and exercises, effective mutual aid systems, coordinated response systems, and outstanding leadership.

I speak with first-hand knowledge of the heroic work done by our public safety team on April 15th and in the following days; I arrived on Boylston Street only minutes after the blasts where I joined city and state command level public safety officials, including Commissioner Ed Davis of the Boston Police Department and Colonel Timothy Alben of the Massachusetts State Police. And I was still with this team five days later when the last of the suspected terrorists was captured in Watertown.

I commend Commissioner Davis of the Boston Police Department, the men and women he commands, and the multitude of first responders from the Boston Fire Department and Boston EMS for their extraordinary performance of their duties under horrific circumstances.

April 15, 2013 marked the 117th running of the Boston Marathon, one of the most prestigious marathons in the world. As it does every year, the race took place on Patriot's Day, a state holiday that commemorates the anniversary of the first battles of the Revolutionary War in 1775.

Unlike most marathons, the Boston Marathon's 26.2 mile course is a relatively straight line that starts in Hopkinton, Massachusetts and proceeds east through eight cities and towns and three counties before ending on Boylston Street in Boston. For local, regional and state public safety officials, the Boston Marathon is one of our largest annual events and we appropriately dedicate substantial planning and operational resources to protect, as best we can, the runners and spectators, and the 8 cities and towns that host the race. These extensive planning and preparedness efforts are intended to ensure readiness to respond to any and all unexpected hazards that threaten health, safety or property.

On April 15th, the public safety community was prepared.

As we have done for the many years, the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency brought together a multi-agency, multi-discipline team last January to begin developing the operational plans for this year's Marathon. We did worst case scenario planning, preparing for a wide array of incidents and events that might impact the Marathon or the host communities. In early April, this multi-disciplinary team conducted a comprehensive tabletop exercise to ensure our readiness.

On race day, an 80 person Multi-Agency Coordination Center - - a MACC -- was operational in the State's Emergency Operations Center at the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency. Representatives from Boston's police, fire and EMS services, and public safety personnel from the other 7 cities and towns along the 26.2 mile course, were present in the MACC along with key state and federal public safety agencies such as the Massachusetts State Police, the Department of Fire Services, the Office of Emergency Medical Services, the Department of Public Health, the National Guard, the Commonwealth Fusion Center, the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, the FAA, the Coast Guard, and the Boston Athletic Association. The MACC was also connected to emergency operations centers in all 8 cities and towns, as well as the Boston Medical Intelligence Center and the Department of Health's Operations Center. Additionally, first responders along the course and command level personnel from all local, state and federal public safety agencies were using interoperable channels on portable radios to maintain effective communications paths. Along the course, local, regional and state tactical teams, hazardous materials response teams, explosive ordinance disposal (EOD) teams, the National Guard Civil Support Team, mobile command posts, and State Police helicopters were deployed as part of an all-hazards operational plan.

In short, when 27,000 runners started the race in Hopkinton, we were prepared from the starting line in Hopkinton to the finish line in Boston. In large part, our high levels of preparedness were due to:

- Investments made in collaboration with Governor Patrick's Administration over the past years using federal homeland security grant funds;
- A longstanding commitment to and implementation of multi-agency, multi-discipline, and multi-jurisdictional training and exercises throughout the state;
- A strong record of collaboration, coordination and cooperation by public officials and public safety leaders;
- An unwavering 24/7 commitment to homeland security by all local, regional, state and federal public and private partners and stakeholders; and
- Lesson learned from local, regional, and state responses to hurricanes, tropic storms, blizzards, ice storms, floods, tornadoes and a massive water system failure that have

resulted in the Commonwealth receiving 16 Presidential Disaster Declarations since 2005.

At 2:50 PM on April 15th, two powerful bombs were intentionally detonated 12 seconds apart on Boylston Street in Boston within short distances of the finish line. The bombs were placed outside of the secure zone of the race course on the public venue sidewalks between the race spectator perimeter and the store fronts along Boylston Street. These areas were packed with race spectators and shoppers. The results were catastrophic: three people killed and close to 300 were injured, dozens of them seriously.

The response by the public – bystanders, witnesses and volunteers - in those moments after the blast was nothing short of remarkable. This sense of community and empowerment to take care of our own was demonstrative of the way our Commonwealth came together in this time of shock and tragedy.

The public safety response was equally incredible. I witnessed this response, and it speaks volumes about the investments that we have made in the Commonwealth to enhance our homeland security. On April 15th and during the next four days, our investments across all five homeland security mission areas - - prevention, protection, mitigation, response and recovery - - paid off in dividends.

Several responding agencies have completed internal after action reviews to identify best practices, lessons learned, and areas needing improvement. A more comprehensive multi-agency, multi-jurisdiction after action review, led by a team of representatives from state agencies and the cities of Boston, Watertown and Cambridge, is currently underway. Even as these initiatives are on-going, several common themes and key factors stand out as we assess the massive, swift and effective public safety response to the bombings.

Foremost, there is a clear correlation between the effectiveness of response operations in and around Boston in the aftermath of the bombings and local, regional and state investments in training, exercise programs, building and sustaining specialized capabilities, activating and maintaining an incident command system, activating and operating emergency operations centers and mobile command posts, as well as our longstanding focus on developing regional response capabilities and mutual aid agreements, and building preexisting strong personal and professional relationships amongst public safety leaders.

There are other key factors that contributed to the effectiveness of response operations.

- The response to the bombings relied heavily on specialized capabilities that have been built and sustained through our homeland security programs, including SWAT and EOD teams, bomb detection K-9's, CBRN detection systems and surveillance systems, command posts and emergency operations centers.
- The response to the bombings was augmented through pre-existing inter- and intra-state mutual aid agreements that have been built on regional response strategies and plans.
- Interoperability was a success story. Over the years, millions of dollars have been invested under local, regional and state interoperability plans, and our investments in mutual aid channels, tactical channel plans, radio towers, new radios, and specialized training allowed first responders, as well as command level personnel, to effectively communicate by radio between agencies, between disciplines, and between jurisdictions. The availability of interoperable radio systems was particularly important to first responders in the first few hours after the bomb blasts because cell phone and land-line telephone systems in the greater Boston area were overloaded by the spike in demand, rendering them largely inoperable.
- We benefited from our history of using pre-planned events like the Marathon as real-life opportunities to exercise and utilize our command posts and emergency operations centers, to test our operational plans and mutual aid systems, to activate our specialized response teams, to stay familiar with the technology based systems that we rely on during emergencies, and to strengthen personal and professional relationships amongst people, agencies, disciplines and jurisdictions that otherwise may not have many opportunities to work together. A reoccurring theme of our after action discussions is that pre-existing strong professional relationships allowed command and line-level responders to be familiar with the capacities and capabilities of other responding agencies and to quickly and effectively mount a large response to the bombings. These strong and positive relationships have been built over many years by joint planning for pre-planned real life events, participating together in exercises, and relying on mutual aid to enhance the response to large scale, multi-jurisdictional incidents and pre-planned events.
- We also benefited from our investments in regional exercise programs, such as the Urban Shield exercises conducted by the Boston Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI), that allow first responders to hone specialized skills and gain familiarity with responders from other areas who may be called in for support under mutual aid agreements.
- The cooperation and collaboration across agencies, disciplines and jurisdictions was immediate and extraordinary. This was truly a best practice that should be noted nationwide. Within minutes of the blasts, local and state public safety leaders

responded to Boylston Street and followed Boston's lead in establishing a command group that effectively shared information, pooled resources, and collaboratively managed a massive response. There was unity of focus and unity of purpose at the command level and through the ranks all the way to the first responders on Boylston Street on April 15th and the thousand plus police officers that participated in the state's largest manhunt on April 18 and 19.

- Existing strong relationships between the Commonwealth Fusion Center, the Boston Regional Intelligence Center, and the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force allowed the Massachusetts State Police and the Boston Police Department to quickly integrate into, and be contributing members of, the post-bombing investigation that was led by the FBI.
- The relationship between public safety leaders and public officials at all times was open, positive and constructive. Governor Patrick and Mayor Menino regularly communicated with one another, and consulted with and were briefed by their public safety leaders such as Commissioner Davis, Colonel Alben of the Massachusetts State Police, General Rice of the Massachusetts National Guard, and Chief Paul MacMillan of the Transit Police Department. Their decisions were informed by, and reflected public safety concerns, needs and objectives. This positive working relationship was based on trust, respect, and a commonality of purpose and mission, and it fostered constructive decision making and opportunities for bold "out of the box" decisions such as Governor Patrick's decision to deploy the National Guard into Boston on April 15th to support law enforcement efforts, and issue the April 19th shelter in place request for Boston, Watertown, and four other surrounding cities.
- The support from the federal government was immediate and effective. On the law enforcement side, every imaginable federal agency dispatched personnel and resources in support of local, regional and state law enforcement response efforts. On the emergency management side, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Department of Health and Human Services had senior people in the command center in Boston only hours after the bombings, and they helped ensure that direct federal assistance was provided as needed. And, the White House and FEMA quickly turned around the Governor's request for an Emergency Declaration, approving direct federal assistance and Category B Emergency Protective Measures within 24 hours of the Governor's request.
- Finally, local and state public safety and emergency management agencies effectively communicated with the public through social media, reverse 911 systems, press releases, press conferences, an emergency alerting Smart Phone app, and - for the first time in Massachusetts - pushed an emergency notification to the public through the

new Wireless Emergency Alert Service that is part of the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System known as IPAWS.

The response by the public to the bombings and ensuing hunt for the suspected terrorists was nothing short of incredible and the support for first responders has been unprecedented. The public heeded requests and directions from Governor Patrick, Mayor Menino and public safety leaders, including the unprecedented request on April 19th that residents of Boston, Watertown and four other surrounding cities remain indoors. Businesses heeded this request as well, and remained closed for an entire business day. The community has responded to these tragic events with compassion, with strength, and with support for the survivors of the bombings, the families of the victims, and the impacted communities. Boston and Watertown, and all of our impacted communities have shown us what it means to be resilient.

As previously mentioned, we are in the process of conducting a comprehensive local, regional and state after action review of the bombings and their aftermath, including our pre-bombing prevention, protection and mitigation strategies and actions, and our response and recovery efforts. At the end of this process, an After Action Report and corrective action plans will be published. We will continue to identify what worked well, where there is need for improvement and gaps that need to be addressed through training, exercises, planning and homeland security investments. We welcome and support a full review, not because we have a basis to believe that the system did not work, but because an event of this magnitude and tragedy requires that we gather and analyze all of the facts and determine what worked, what might not have worked, and if there are areas for improvement.

Even as we move through the after action process, I can still confidently state that investments made with homeland security dollars enhanced our capability to respond to these tragic events.

I think it's important to end by stating that Governor Patrick and I have tremendous pride in our community of public safety professionals who demonstrated so well its commitment to public safety, even under the most difficult of circumstances. These were trying times, and we are able to look back upon them with admiration for the collaboration and partnerships that truly made a difference.