

**Written Statement for the Record
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**Hearing before the
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Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency**

“Identifying the Enemy: Radical Islamist Terror”

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Chairman Perry, Ranking Member Watson Coleman, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this written statement for the record. I welcome the opportunity to discuss priorities and key actions of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to Counter Violent Extremism (CVE).

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 commit acts of violence within the United States. As Secretary Johnson has said, we are in a new phase in the global terrorist threat.

DHS recognizes that the types of attacks we have seen at home and abroad are not just terrorist-directed attacks, but also terrorist-inspired attacks. These attacks are conducted by those who live among us in the homeland and self-radicalize, inspired by terrorist propaganda on the internet. Terrorist-inspired attacks are often difficult to detect by our intelligence and law-enforcement communities. They can occur with little or no notice, and present a complex homeland security challenge.

The current threat environment requires new types of responses. Our federal efforts, along with our coalition partners, continue to take the fight militarily to terrorist organizations overseas. ISIL is the most prominent terrorist organization on the world stage. Since September 2014, air strikes and special operations have led to the death of a number of ISIL’s leaders and those focused on plotting attacks in the West. At the same time, ISIL has lost a significant portion of the populated areas it once controlled in Iraq, and thousands of square miles of territory it once controlled in Syria. However, as ISIL loses territory, it has increased attacks and attempted attacks on targets outside of Iraq and Syria. It continues to encourage attacks in the United States, which makes the Department’s work ever more critical.

Specifically, we are concerned about attempts by ISIL and other terrorist 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, 2016 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 United States since 9/11 and the worst mass shooting in U.S. history.

Given the evolution of threats to the homeland, efforts to counter violent extremism here at home are vital.

Counterterrorism remains the cornerstone of the Department of Homeland Security's mission, while homegrown violent extremists (HVEs) remain the most likely immediate threat to the homeland. As such, countering violent extremism (CVE) has become a key focus of DHS's work to secure the homeland.

Al Qaeda and ISIL continue to target Muslim communities in our country to recruit and inspire individuals to commit acts of terror. Well informed families and communities are the best defense against terrorist ideologies, including violent Islamist ideologies, which represent the current threat from ISIL's propaganda. Within this context, working with communities to prevent and intervene in the process of radicalization to violence has become a homeland security imperative. Preventing homegrown terrorist attacks in the future will require the government and civic leaders to deepen their ties to American Muslim communities. Muslims are not only the greatest victims of ISIL inspired terrorism, but may also be best placed to identify potential symptoms of ISIL inspired radicalization to violence.

However, we also know that violent extremist threats come from a range of groups and individuals, including domestic terrorists and homegrown violent extremists in the United States, as well as international terrorist groups like Al Qaeda and ISIL. While ISIL and Al Qaeda continue to pose the most immediate threat, as the attacks in San Bernardino and Orlando have demonstrated, events in Charleston, Dallas and Oak Creek, Wisconsin also illustrate how extremists here in the United States similarly advocate violence. As we tragically experienced fifteen years ago with the terrorist attacks on 9/11, a failure of imagination when anticipating the evolution of the threat can have devastating consequences, and we want to ensure that we are focused on the full landscape of the violent extremist spectrum.

The DHS Office for Community Partnerships (OCP) was created to further our domestic CVE efforts and provide support to communities, state and local partners, and other civic organizations who are actively seeking tools and resources to protect their own communities. We have seen over and over again across the United States post-9/11 that federal efforts to prevent violent extremism will only be successful with the trust of local communities and stakeholders.

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 grouping using law enforcement, screening and protection activities, this discipline counters the ideological recruitment, focusing on the potential root causes of many terrorist motivations, and working to prevent those causes, or provide “off-ramps” for individuals who may have taken steps toward embracing ideologically motivated violence. There are several broad definitions of CVE, but typically noting that CVE is a collection of noncoercive, nonkinetic, and, most importantly, voluntary activities to prevent and intervene in the process of radicalization to violence 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.

There is no one path for an individual to take in becoming radicalized to violence. From what we know about people who have joined terrorist organizations, it is clear that there is some combination of ideological, psychological, and community-based factors that leads them in that direction.

Our federal approach to CVE is described in the Administration’s 2011 *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 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, Secretary Johnson announced an Office for Community Partnerships in 2015. 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.

OCP's mission is to develop and implement a full-range of products and services to support and enhance efforts by key stakeholders to prevent radicalization and recruitment to violence by violent extremists. The Office leverages the resources and relationships of the Department and applies the personal leadership of the Secretary and senior leadership to empower leaders in both the public and private sectors to spur societal change to counter violent extremism.

Our major initiatives this year include: engaging with the philanthropic community to facilitate long-term partnerships with communities; engaging with the tech sector to empower credible voices in diverse communities against violent extremism; conducting community outreach activities to raise awareness of patterns and trends of radicalization and recruitment to violence online; strengthening and expanding DHS field staff dedicated to supporting community based efforts to counter violent extremism; and working with FEMA to increase access to grants that support state and local CVE initiatives.

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. Key stakeholders and partners working with OCP include the private sector, civil society and local law enforcement. Influential community leaders such as religious leaders, city councils and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) work directly with OCP field staff in identifying community priority issues, conducting CVE community exercises, and addressing concerns at community engagement roundtables in partnership with the DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties. OCP also works with local, state and federal law enforcement by providing training, exercises, and technical assistance.

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 mission of the Task Force is to coordinate a whole-of-government effort to empower local partners to prevent violent extremism in the United States.

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 coordinating and prioritizing federal CVE research and establishing feedback mechanisms to increase the relevance of CVE findings; synchronizing federal CVE outreach and engagement; managing CVE communications and leveraging digital technologies to engage, empower, and connect CVE stakeholders; and supporting the development of intervention programs. Ensuring that the nation's CVE efforts are sufficiently resourced has been an integral part of our overall efforts.

International Efforts

Internationally, DHS regularly exchanges best practices and works to enhance our understanding of regional threat variation through multilateral and bilateral engagements. At the February 2016 Five Country Ministerial meeting hosted by Secretary Johnson and Attorney General Lynch, Ministers from the security, justice, and immigration ministries in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom committed to share best practices and methods for countering violent extremism, enhance analytical cooperation to measure the impacts of CVE programs, and develop an exchange program between officials in our five countries. They also recognized that violent extremism poses a critical threat for all five countries and decided to coordinate CVE activity, including by engaging with communities and with social media and other high-tech industries. They also recognized that while government engagement is important, government itself cannot and should not be the only actor to counter violent extremism, and needs to partner with communities to reach isolated and vulnerable individuals and address the drivers of violent extremism in our societies. These types of international engagements enhance our understanding of the challenges posed by radicalization to violence, and provide useful mechanisms for developing new approaches for addressing these challenges. Moving forward, there are robust efforts to share promising practices and research among many countries to enhance our understanding and build a stronger evidence base.

In addition to our international partnerships, OCP also works closely with the State Department's Global Engagement Center (GEC). The task force leadership and GEC leadership regularly meet to discuss a range of CVE issues. In addition, GEC Director Lumpkin and I have open lines of communication as do a number of their key personnel with OCP and task force staff. DHS also has a full-time detailee to the GEC who regularly reports to and meets with task force personnel. Finally, the task force receives GEC guidance on messaging opportunities as well as ongoing strategic guidance on themes used by the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL, which are then disseminated to a range of key stakeholders as appropriate.

We also work closely with other Department of State offices on CVE issues. The task force works closely with the CT/CVE Bureau and the Department of State's CVE Director.

Working to De-legitimize ISIL

At the White House CVE summit in February 2015, President Obama noted "Al Qaeda and ISIL and groups like it are desperate for legitimacy. They try to portray themselves as religious leaders -- holy warriors in defense of Islam. That's why ISIL presumes to declare itself the 'Islamic State.' And they propagate the notion that America -- and the West, generally -- is at war with Islam. That's how they recruit. That's how they try to radicalize young people. We must never accept the premise that they put forward, because it is a lie. Nor should we grant these terrorists the religious legitimacy that they seek. They are not religious leaders -- they're terrorists. And we are not at war with Islam. We are at war with people who have perverted Islam."¹

Within this context, the Department and the Administration continue to reject the terrorist ~~narrative that the West and Islam are in conflict~~, as well as the notion that terrorists like ISIL

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/18/remarks-president-closing-summit-countering-violent-extremism>

genuinely represent Islam. It is for this reason that we do not use the phrase “radical Islam”, because we want to underscore and reinforce the fact that ISIL does not represent Islam and cannot assert any kind of religious legitimacy to justify its barbaric terrorism.

However, in the same speech referenced above, President Obama also noted that “Muslim communities have a responsibility as well. Al Qaeda and ISIL do draw, selectively, from the Islamic texts. They do depend upon the misperception around the world that they speak in some fashion for people of the Muslim faith, that Islam is somehow inherently violent, that there is some sort of clash of civilizations.” Further, President Obama also acknowledged that Muslim leaders need to do more to discredit the notion that there’s an inherent clash in civilizations between Islam and the West.

Within this context, I would emphasize that the Administration has clearly laid out the threat posed by ISIL’s persistent attempts to recruit and radicalize to violence American Muslim communities domestically. However, as we continue our efforts to counter this threat, we have also been consistent in denying ISIL the religious legitimacy that they desperately seek as part of their broader efforts to continually recruit and radicalize to violence American citizens.

Ultimately, our CVE efforts will only be successful with the participation of all community leaders, especially American Muslim communities, who not only play an integral role in countering the message of terrorist groups like ISIL but may also be best placed to identify potential symptoms of ISIL inspired radicalization to violence.

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 tech leaders in New York in November 2015, and with social media executives in San Francisco in January 2016, and. 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 terrorist messaging and recruitment online, the Department supports the Peer-To-Peer (P2P): Challenging Extremism contests. P2P is a government-sponsored competition, launched in 2015, to empower students at 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, more than 3,000 students representing 125 university teams from more than 30 countries have participated in this unique program. In Fall 2016, DHS is supporting 50 teams at U.S. colleges and universities around the country, and DHS remains committed to working with partners across the government to scale up these domestic student-designed campaigns and projects.

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 (domestic and international) during the competition. Facebook's participation has also allowed the initiative to expand to more than one hundred international teams in Fall 2016.

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, and 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 relationships and empowering partners – particularly those in civil society and the private sector – to develop and amplify content that resonates against ISIL, Al Qaeda, 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 NGOs 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 to operate.

DHS CVE Grants Program

In December, 2015, 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.

The Department formally issued a notice of funding opportunity on July 6, 2016 announcing the new Countering Violent Extremism Grant Program. Applications were due September 6th, and the response has been overwhelming. We received over 200 applications from 42 States, Territories and Washington, D.C. They are from the broad array of applicants: local and state governments; regional coalitions of governments both law enforcement and non-law enforcement; Universities and non-profits from across the spectrum of categories such as peace and diplomacy, civic engagement, refugee services, mental health services, and religious related institutions, including multiple faiths and interfaith organizations.

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.

Preventing the next generation of recruits to terrorism has become more important than ever. A generation ago, individuals may have been radicalized to violence by members of their local communities over the course of several years; now, while that still takes place, it is far more common to self-radicalize to violence online. One example of the older model in transition is Zachary Chesser, a Virginia native who has plead guilty to supporting Somali terrorists and crimes of violence. He was a typical suburban Virginia youth; growing up, he was a good student and a soccer fan. He radicalized to violence between 2008 and 2010, integrating online violent extremist material with in-person relationships and the exchange of formal letters.²

By contrast more recently, we now see individuals like the two men who departed London to fight with ISIL in Syria no less than two weeks after purchasing *Islam for Dummies* so they could learn the basic information about their purported cause.³ ISIL's deft use of the Internet, together with the wide availability of ISIL's messaging, has broadened the population of potentially vulnerable individuals, and shortened the timespan of their recruitment.

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.

This is the vision we are working to implement today, through the important work of building a comprehensive CVE model that ensures safe and resilient communities in the Homeland. Thank you again for the opportunity to address this critical issue.

² <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/CHESSER%20FINAL%20REPORT.pdf>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/08/two-british-men-admit-linking-extremist-group-syria>