



One Hundred Fourteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515

March 17, 2016

The Honorable Michael T. McCaul
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security
H2-176 Ford House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman McCaul:

I am writing to request that you schedule a hearing to receive testimony from the Director of the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Office of Community Partnerships (OCP). This request is even more urgent because of your decision to notice yet-to-be-introduced countering violent extremism (CVE) legislation for consideration by the Full Committee on March 23, 2016.

Over the past year, there have been a number of significant developments in how DHS and its Federal partners approach CVE. On September 28, 2015, Secretary Johnson announced the creation of the OCP in order to consolidate the Department's countering violent extremism (CVE) efforts into a single office. Funding for the Department's CVE activities was included in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2016 ("Omnibus")¹ and is matched in the President's FY 2017 request. DHS-wide CVE activities were appropriated at \$49 million. Within these funds, \$10 million is requested for OCP for a new CVE grant initiative to help State and local communities prepare for, prevent, and respond to emergent threats from violent extremism. Additionally, \$39 million is allotted for an grant funding initiative to help State and local governments prepare for, prevent, and respond to complex, coordinated terrorist attacks with the potential for mass casualties and infrastructure damage. Yesterday, in a hearing before the Committee on Homeland Security, Secretary Jeh Johnson testified that the available funds were too little to be effective, and the Department would send Congress a reprogramming request.²

¹ H.R. 2029. The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2016. 114th Cong. (2015)(enacted).

² Committee on Homeland Security. "DHS in Today's Dangerous World: Examining the Department's Budget and Readiness to Counter Homeland Threats." March 16, 2016.

Secretary Johnson also testified that OCP has not determined how it will distribute grant funding to local communities, academic institutions, and non-government organizations.³

To date, Members of the Committee have not heard directly from the head of OCP on how it is carrying out its mission or the Department's future plans to promote countering violent extremism through community partnerships. With terrorist organizations moving rapidly in their recruitment of our children, coworkers, and neighbors, countering violent extremism should be a top priority for this committee. We have an obligation to conduct oversight in a transparent manner that is not hidden or circumvented. It is our responsibility to act as serious lawmakers and legislate in a thoughtful and informed manner; it is imperative that we embrace facts and not fear.

The legislation you circulated today would require the Secretary to use public testimonials of so-called "former or estranged violent extremists or their associates" in the Department's counter-messaging and community engagement activities.⁴ Since the Committee has never heard from the leadership of the OCP in an open setting, we do not have the benefit of having received testimony on the potential risks of such an approach. However, the Committee has received informal feedback from the Department that the negative public perceptions about how such testimonials are obtained could endanger the effectiveness of its community engagement efforts.

We have a moral obligation to the American people, and it is the responsibility under our bipartisan Committee Oversight Plan to ask questions and debate these issues in a public and transparent manner. Therefore, I request that you (1) postpone consideration of the CVE measure that was circulated today; and (2) schedule a hearing where the Committee can receive testimony from the Director of OCP on its funding needs, programming strategy, counter-messaging tools, and plans for community engagement.

Thanks you for your timely attention to this matter. If you have further questions, please contact Lanier Avant, Staff Director, at (202) 226-2616.

Sincerely,


BENNIE G. THOMPSON
Ranking Member

³ Id.

⁴ H.R. ___ "The Combating Terrorist Recruitment Act of 2016".