



TESTIMONY OF
GEORGE TURNER, CHIEF OF POLICE
ON BEHALF OF THE
ATLANTA POLICE DEPARTMENT
AND THE
MAJOR CITIES CHIEFS ASSOCIATION
BEFORE THE
EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE SUBCOMMITTEE
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

"State of Emergency, the Disaster of Cutting Preparedness Grants"

March 15, 2016



Chairman Donovan, Ranking Member Payne and Members of the Subcommittee, I appear before you today as the Chief of Police for Atlanta, the largest metropolitan region in the South. It is also my privilege to be on the Board of Directors and 2nd Vice President for the Major Cities Chiefs, representing every major urban area in our Nation – the communities which would suffer most from further reductions in Federal assistance for law enforcement. I speak today as one Police Chief on behalf of my colleagues from the 68 largest cities in the United States.

Needed Support for the Front Lines of Public Safety

As Mayor De Blasio has noted, local police and public safety officers today stand on the front lines of both preparedness and response, just as they did in New York and Washington D.C. on September 11, 2001. But the proposed 2017 budget reductions represent the most drastic cuts in a downward spiral of declining help from Washington. In the face of the current threat, Police Chiefs agree with the title of today's hearing – it is indeed a disaster.

As the law enforcement witness in this hearing, I appeal to Congress not to abandon the officers who put their lives on the line every day. Forgive me if a term like “abandon” sounds like hyperbole, but for police officers in every major American city, I can tell you this is not empty rhetoric. There is no other way to describe the dramatic decreases in DHS support for local police and first responders. DHS funding for the combined grant programs in 2010 was more than \$3 Billion. By 2016, the current fiscal year, it had fallen to half that amount. If Congress were to approve the cuts proposed for the coming year, law enforcement agencies could receive as little as a third of what was once provided by Washington.

Federal agencies and other parts of DHS have not suffered any sort of comparable reductions. Speaking for men and women in uniform on the front lines, we implore the Committee to reverse this alarming trend and to strengthen support for public safety in your own communities back home.

Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI)

We ask the Committee to consider the responsibility that each of you shares with a Chief of Police – protecting the American people from harm. Major Cities Chiefs counts every one of the UASI cities in our membership and that means we have a direct tie to the important work of this Subcommittee. As we reflect on the events abroad in Paris and in San Bernardino here at home, it is evident that preparedness for a terrorist attack is a higher priority than ever before. Major Cities Chiefs hosted San Bernardino officials at our last meeting and we heard first-hand what comprised their preparedness and response to the attack. It was a case study in the work of this Subcommittee – it was all about preparedness. Whether from ISIS abroad or home-grown extremists, the threat is real and it haunts police chiefs every day. But the DHS programs designed to support preparedness and prevention efforts have been diminished as the threat has increased. UASI is a small shadow of what it once was. The proposed budget cuts UASI to \$330 Million. If you add the State Homeland Security Grant Program proposal for \$200 Million, that is a total of \$530 Million, just a third of the more than \$1.6 Billion back in 2009 and 2010.



Partnerships to Prevent Terrorism

In spite of these budget cuts, our work with the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice is stronger than ever before. We share intelligence, work joint cases, conduct preparedness exercises and all of these efforts make us stronger. Yet, funding for our Federal partners has grown while support for our partnership with DHS has been slashed to a fraction of what we received in the past.

We ask the Subcommittee to consider if this is a balanced partnership. The proposed budget of DHS would be reduced from \$41.1 Billion to \$40.6 billion, a reduction of \$500 Million. But the two grant programs which assist State and local agencies would be cut by \$537 Million, **more than the entire amount of the reduction for the Department of Homeland Security.**

As a Police Chief, I have assigned many personnel to Federal task forces and our regional fusion center. Every day we are asked to assist one Federal agency or another. But funding from Washington does not even cover a small part of the cost to the Atlanta Police Department. The same is true in every other major American City – we are really subsidizing the Federal Government – because what we receive from Washington does not begin to pay that bill.

Law Enforcement Terrorism Prevention Program (LETPP)

Congress intended for law enforcement to have a law enforcement set-aside comparable to line item programs for Fire Chiefs, Emergency Management, Ports and other top priorities. But the intent of Congress has not been followed when it comes to LETPP, as it is no longer a stand-alone program and no longer a priority. Congress directed that LETPP should be funded at not less than 25% of the sum of SHSGP and UASI. Rather than maintain LETPP as a program and fund it at the required level, FEMA eliminated the program and merely applied the percentage to broad definitions in the other programs. For the proposed budget, that would represent about \$137 Million, less than a third of the amount now proposed for cyber security and less than a third law enforcement funding in 2009 and 2010.

Unlike the other programs called out in legislation, terrorism prevention and law enforcement have somehow disappeared. There is no line item, no set-aside and no separate program. Unlike the past practice where an LETPP amount was separately designated for each State, now only two programs appear - the State grant program and UASI. Following Paris and San Bernardino, LETPP is gone at a time when it is needed more than ever before.

Funding Consistency and Continuity

The process used by DHS to determine UASI funding continues to be both vexing and contradictory. For many of the major cities it has been a roller coaster ride of ups and downs. Police Chiefs cannot even consider a preparedness budget when they do not know if they are “in or out”. Take the case of Las Vegas, obviously an iconic terrorist target with more and more venues growing each year. But according to the formula process, Las Vegas is a threat some years and not others. We would ask the Committee to investigate how these decisions are made, in order to ensure consistency and continuity for preparedness planning in the years to come.



Investment and Sustainment

Official reports indicate that Congress has invested upwards of \$40 Billion across the Nation since DHS was established. As you look forward into 2017, I would suggest to the Committee that you also look back on what you have already invested. I have been with the Atlanta Police Department every day since the September 11 attacks and I have witnessed all that DHS has done to help my department and our community. These efforts were never planned as one-time events. Baseline capabilities were reached, Federal standards were satisfied – but it's my job to ensure that these preparedness capabilities are sustained. I cannot do so if the proposed cuts were to be approved by Congress.

An example of a success partnership is our work with TSA and other DHS components at the Atlanta Airport. The world's busiest airport, the Hartsfield Jackson Airport is protected by Atlanta personnel in a team effort with DHS that includes a model canine program we conduct with TSA.

Sustainment is an ongoing challenge. Exercises must be repeated for new and changing personnel. Equipment must be serviced and updated. Even batteries must be replaced. Virtually none of the DHS investments will last indefinitely. Mr. Chairman, to sustain those capabilities must be the highest priority for preparedness – the top priority of this Subcommittee. Much will be lost without adequate resources for sustainment.

Training and Technical Assistance

The September 11 attacks in New York and Washington D.C. will always serve as a tragic reminder of critical gaps. Communications is a major responsibility for this Subcommittee and it is a continuing challenge for Chiefs of Police and Sheriffs across the Nation. We should never forget that hundreds of New York's first responders perished without radio interoperability on September 11, 2001, and the agencies responding to the Pentagon were likewise unable to communicate with each other.

Investments in communications preparedness are also sustained by training and technical assistance provided by DHS. I call your attention to the DHS Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) which falls under your jurisdiction. Atlanta and other major cities have benefited greatly from efforts to sustain our mobile radio capabilities. Boston officials reported that emergency communications did not falter during the bombings, and attributed their success to preparedness training, exercises and technical assistance. Atlanta area agencies have received OEC training and technical assistance on multiple occasions, attached as an appendix to my testimony, as a key example of the important work of this Subcommittee. While the interoperable communications grant program came to an untimely end in 2010, we need to strengthen current communications capabilities and migrate to new broadband technologies. We recommend that the Subcommittee continue to ensure that DHS has resources to sustain and strengthen vital assistance programs such as OEC.

Law Enforcement Intelligence and Information Sharing

We are grateful for the work of the Office of State and Local Law Enforcement (OSLLE) at DHS. Congress established that office to coordinate law enforcement activities and I can report to the Subcommittee that it fulfills the intent of Congress every day. Likewise, we are working closely with the Office of



Intelligence and Analysis (I&A) to strengthen our partnership with DHS, especially regarding the operation of our regional fusion centers.

In Georgia, we have had a number of militia cases and we are deeply concerned about home-grown extremists. For this reason, we strongly support DHS efforts to Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) and Major Cities Chiefs will engage with DHS leadership to roll out CVE initiatives in urban areas. To this end, Major Cities Chiefs has established a network of Intelligence Commanders from every major urban area, working together as our Criminal Intelligence Enterprise (CIE). Our intelligence personnel have designed a common approach to threat assessment and they share information to prepare and analyze similar and common threats. We are grateful to DHS officials for their partnership in this unprecedented endeavor to prevent and interdict the terrorist threat in our communities.

The Way Forward

Chairman Donovan and Ranking Member Payne, Chiefs of Police are grateful for all you do, and we look to you for leadership. To accept the proposed 2017 cuts would forfeit so much of what you have invested since the inception of DHS, and leave local agencies like my own to fend for themselves while Federal agencies continue to grow.

As Chiefs of Police we know our common bond with you is the safety of the public we have sworn to protect. To this end, we implore you to restore balance to our partnership with DHS by protecting the funding which sustains the work of this Subcommittee.



Appendix A: UASI Funding History

- **2009**
 - ✓ UASI \$798,631
 - ✓ SHSP \$861,265
- **2010**
 - ✓ UASI \$832,520
 - ✓ SHSP \$842,000
- **2011**
 - ✓ UASI \$662,662
 - ✓ SHSP \$526,874
- **2012**
 - ✓ UASI \$490,376
 - ✓ SHSP \$294,000
- **2013**
 - ✓ UASI \$558,745
 - ✓ SHSP \$354,644
- **2014**
 - ✓ UASI \$587,000
 - ✓ SHSP \$401,346
- **2015**
 - ✓ UASI \$587,000
 - ✓ SHSP \$402,000
- **2016**
 - ✓ UASI \$580,000
 - ✓ SHSP \$402,000
- **Proposed 2017**
 - ✓ UASI \$330,000
 - ✓ SHSP \$200,000



Appendix B: DHS Office of Emergency Communications Assistance to Atlanta

July 2009 – Supported the development of an SOP for the Georgia Interoperability Network (GIN). Representative of Atlanta attended and provided comments on the draft (Held in Athens, GA)

May 2010 – Performed a Communications Unit Leader (COML) training in downtown Atlanta. Included attendees from various disciplines.

July 2010 – Performed an engineering coverage assessment for the state including the Atlanta Metropolitan area

August 2011 – Presented an overview of the National Interoperability Field Operations Guide (NIFOG) and its underlying principles to 60 attendees in the Atlanta Metropolitan area from various disciplines.

August 2012 – Presented an overview of the National Interoperability Field Operations Guide (NIFOG) and its underlying principles to over 70 attendees in the Atlanta Metropolitan area.

September 2012 to April 2013 – Worked with personnel from the City of Atlanta to update their current Tactical Interoperable Communications Plan and then utilized the components of that plan to develop a Communications Field Operations Guide for the Atlanta Metropolitan area.

April 2013 - Performed a Communications Unit Leader (COML) Train-the-Trainer course in downtown Atlanta. This training is intended to build a cadre of instructors who are locally based across the State so that the State may carry out their own COML courses.

June 2013 – Carried out a Public Safety Communications Center Operations Workshop in the City of Atlanta attended by and focused on personnel from public safety answering points (PSAPs) and dispatch centers across the State and City of Atlanta.

August 2015 – Performed a pilot delivery of the All-Hazards Incident Communications Center Manager Training, designed to prepare COMLs and Dispatch Supervisors and public safety communication professionals for managing all functions in the Incident Communications Center.