
Government of the District of Columbia



Metropolitan Police Department

Testimony of
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***Ten Years After 9/11:
A Status Report on Information Sharing***

United States Senate
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Honorable Joseph I. Lieberman, Chair
Honorable Susan M. Collins, Ranking Member

October 12, 2011

U.S. Senate
342 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC

Chairman Lieberman, Ranking Member Collins, members of the Committee, staff and guests – thank you for the opportunity to present this statement on the status of information sharing among federal and local partners. I am the Chief of Police of the Metropolitan Police Department of the District of Columbia, the primary police force in the nation’s capital. As the Chief of a major city police department, I am very pleased to be able to brief you on the significant progress made in federal—local information sharing, and how that has improved our ability to safeguard the public.

In my testimony, I will elaborate on why it is even more important now, ten years later, to recognize the vital role of local law enforcement in our homeland security efforts. With threats to the nation constantly evolving, local law enforcement officers who are on the street every day are uniquely positioned to detect and prevent terrorist incidents. There are more than 700,000 law enforcement members across the nation that know and are connected to the communities they serve, placing them in the best position to detect and investigate criminal activity that might be connected to terrorism or violent extremism. Clearly, information sharing with local police is essential to countering the threats we face going forward. .

The success of local law enforcement in fulfilling our role hinges on the cooperation and support of our federal partners. Ten years after the September 11th attack on the United States, the partnership between federal and local authorities is robust and continues to improve. The ten year anniversary of 9/11 presented an excellent case study to illustrate how the infrastructure and relationships we have built operates in critical situations.

Important groundwork for the anniversary preparations was established in 2010. With a significant increase in American citizens or residents aligned with violent Islamic extremists arrested or convicted in 2009, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) launched a broad working group on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). From the outset, this working group included local law enforcement. Following that effort, DHS and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) committed to a partnership with MPD to engage and educate our partners in the private sector and the community. Beginning in 2010, we jointly briefed thousands of government and private sector partners around the National Capital Region on recognizing and reporting suspicious activity; as

well as responding to potential terrorist threats. Those briefings certainly paid off, as you will see, when we entered the high threat period of the 9/11 10-year anniversary.

Fast forwarding to last month, early on the morning of September 8, 2011, I received virtually simultaneous calls from my own official in the Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) and my counterpart at the Department of Homeland Security urging me to attend a classified briefing on an emerging threat to Washington, DC, and New York. Within an hour, both the FBI and DHS provided me with unfettered access to the actual cable outlining the threat. This shows that not only have we built strong relationships in the region, but more importantly the institutional structures that we have created are ensuring the flow of information. What was perhaps even more important was the quality of the information made available to me. The details in the briefings were far greater than law enforcement had received in the past and enabled our officers to focus on the specifics of the threat.

Equally important, within 24 hours, the intelligence community collectively decided that the public needed to be informed of this credible threat, a significant departure from previous experiences. This decision helped law enforcement in several ways. For one, many of the actions of local law enforcement are much more visible than those of our federal partners, and in many cases are intended to be. In other words, our community members notice when we takes steps in relation to a heightened threat – they see us on the street, around critical infrastructure, and they know that something unusual is happening. Although this may only be a local concern, announcing the threat helps local authorities explain – and sometimes justify – our actions to the public. Local partners appreciate this support. More importantly, making this potential threat public helped us focus our community on reporting suspicious activity that may help us detect and deter those who may be interested in carrying out this threat. Obviously, when we can effectively harness and direct the attentions of the public, we can get more – and more useful – information to help us counter a threat. In this case, after the announcement our calls for suspicious activity jumped significantly.

Most importantly, this announcement caused many of our private sector partners that had been involved in the joint briefings months earlier to report specific suspicious activity that warranted

further investigation. For example, on September 10th, MPD was contacted by the general manager of a local hotel who advised that six males from various Middle Eastern countries had checked into the hotel between the 8th and the 10th. The last to arrive paid cash for his room, and asked for a specific view of a notable landmark. All six individuals placed “Do Not Disturb” placards on their doors. A manager at another hotel contacted MPD on September 11th to report that cleaning personnel had found suspicious items left in a hotel room. The occupant had departed early without checking out, and leaving cash for the room. In this instance, the activity was linked to suspicious financial transactions reported earlier in the week. MPD and the FBI determined that the case did not have a nexus to terrorism, but was linked to criminal activity. Although neither instance was related to the 9/11 threat or to terrorism, the hotel managers took the right step in calling to report these indicators.

As you can see, providing some information to the public helps our efforts in the long run. It is a recognized principle in policing that sometimes you need to give a little information in order to get information. With the information about the threat on the anniversary of 9/11, and the visible government mobilization to it, the public is reminded of the importance of sharing information about suspicious activities with authorities. It reinforces the significance of the “See Something, Say Something” campaign, which is strongly supported by federal and local partners.

Fortunately, our experience here in the District of Columbia during the threats around the 9/11 anniversary highlighted several areas in which information sharing has improved. However, recognizing that my experience as the Chief of Police of the nation’s capital may differ from other chiefs around the country, I reached out to colleagues around the country, including Charles Ramsey, current Police Commissioner in Philadelphia and President of the Major City Chiefs, and of course former chief of MPD, and Raymond Kelly, the Police Commissioner of the New York Police Department. Across the board, local law enforcement chiefs agreed that the progress since 9/11 has been tremendous.

One person simply and aptly described the fusion centers and the FBI’s Field Intelligence Group and Directorate of Intelligence as “game changers” for local police departments. We would not be able to prepare for and work together to prevent the significant threats facing our communities

without this sea change in governmental cooperation. In addition to these cornerstones of federal—local information sharing, we continue to work on new links between the levels of government and with the private sector.

The Washington Regional Threat and Analysis Center, the District's fusion center, serves a critical role in receiving, vetting and sharing suspicious activity reports (SARs). The MPD receives SARs through many different methods, including 911 calls, text messages, email, our iWatchDC public web portal, from trained terrorism liaison officers, TRAPWire® reports from critical infrastructure sites, and observations made by patrol officers during the course of their duties. All of these SAR reports are forwarded to the fusion center and reviewed by trained analysts to ensure that the reports meet the established standards for suspicious activity reporting. If they do, the reports are entered into software programs where they are plotted for pattern analysis and proximity to critical infrastructure and other sensitive locations. The vetted reports are then entered into the National SAR Shared Space where they are available for review by the national network of fusion centers, and are forwarded to the FBI's eGuardian system for investigation by the Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF).

While the high tech support may be more interesting, low tech support is just as important. Our DHS partnership here in the District has been critical in educating the private sector about detecting and protecting business and customers from risks and threats. Even before the launch of the CVE working group, DHS has been a constant partner in trainings for the District's hospitals, hospitality industry, Business Improvement Districts, and others. They provide materials such as CDs and booklets that my Department would not be able to fund. Most importantly, they lend credibility to our public education efforts.

As we continue this forward progress, there are several areas that we should focus on. The most critical need continues to be effective and interoperable communications. Although the 9/11 anniversary highlighted the advances we have made in the past ten years, the earthquake that struck the region a few weeks earlier highlighted a problem we have not solved: instant communications. When the earthquake struck, I was in a Drug Enforcement Administration briefing with two other police chiefs. For at least 15 minutes after it struck, we were not able to

use our cell phones to communicate with anyone. Rest assured, we do have other options. We can use the Government Emergency Telecommunications Service (GETS), the decades-old failsafe communication procedure. We can, of course, also use police radios. But neither of these methods is efficient. Using the GETS card takes time, and, during emergencies, police radios will already be subject to increased traffic from the public calls for service. Neither of these is the answer for a secure and reliable communication network. From my perspective, the federal government must move forward with D-Block, a broadband spectrum for first responders. It is past time for this recommendation from the 9/11 Commission to be implemented.

Beyond that critical step, the overarching imperative is that we must continue to institutionalize this information sharing. If this process is just built on relationships and personalities, there will be gaps and it will ultimately fail. Most people in the federal community are excellent partners, but my colleagues around the country report that, to put it bluntly, some people and organizations still don't get it. More specifically, although progress has been made on over-classification, we must remain vigilant. It is particularly frustrating to local officials when major media outlets share more information than we have. It can't be an effective security strategy to have law enforcement learning of threats or other intelligence at the same time that the public and potential terrorists learn of it. Local law enforcement recognizes and respects that intelligence agencies are reluctant to reveal their sources or techniques. However we continue to believe the intelligence interests can be readily balanced with the need to share actionable intelligence. Although we share the same ultimate goal of safeguarding the country, both the law enforcement and intelligence community still need to work to understand the varying intermediate interests and operations of the other, in order to help each other more effectively and efficiently work to attain our organizational goals.

Maintaining robust fusion centers and co-locating analysts helps to counter any natural tendencies in the intelligence and law enforcement communities to operate in silos. This familiarity also helps the intelligence community to better target the information they share. There has certainly been progress in this area, but local law enforcement is still given more information than we can sift through. This brings us to one of the most critical issues facing local partnerships in homeland security – funding. Nationwide, local law enforcement faces significant budget pressures, and

police departments need federal support and resources to continue their vital work. This includes funding for fusion centers and analysts to work with law enforcement.

Although the technology to support homeland security efforts has advanced in areas many could not have foreseen a decade ago, we now eagerly look to future improvements. For instance, classified information is currently only available in specific locations, which requires that all organizations have representation at the right places. But public safety and homeland security is not a stationary effort. When there is a public safety threat facing a city, chiefs of police do not sit in a command center; we are out on the street, assessing conditions on the ground, directing our officers, and reassuring the public. Therefore, we must find ways to share classified information on the move.

This would also help us with another gap: involving smaller jurisdictions in this effort. Although smaller jurisdictions have even fewer resources to devote to homeland security efforts than our major cities, our small cities and towns are just as likely to be the setting for suspicious and criminal activities. Larger police departments and the federal government bear equal responsibility for reaching out to and involving smaller law enforcement agencies. Regional fusion centers can fulfill a critical role by increasing outreach and technical assistance to smaller local law enforcement agencies. Every agency should have a trained Terrorism Liaison Officer able to connect their agency with regional and national efforts to detect and deter terrorist threats.

In closing, federal and local coordination in countering terrorism has advanced significantly over the past ten years. I know that the District, the National Capital Region, and the country are safer because of this work. However, we cannot rest as we still have work to do. I look forward to continuing to work with all of you on this vital effort.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today.