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Statement of Chairman Jane Harman
Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Intelligence, Information Sharing & Terrorism Risk Assessment

“The Way Forward on Fusion Centers: Challenges and Strategies For Change”
Thursday, September 27, 2007

More than six years after 9/11, our country has seen a revolution in information sharing – perhaps most dramatically at the State and local levels with the creation of some forty-two intelligence “fusion centers”.

A year ago this month, Charlie Allen – the Department’s Chief Intelligence Officer – noted that, “Fusion centers are recognized by the Director of National Intelligence as a center of gravity, key to the effective exchange and assessment of information between the Federal government and state and local partners.”

These centers – staffed by police and sheriffs’ officers, public health authorities, private sector representatives, and others – are an effective “ground up” response to the need for more and better information about terrorist threats so communities can prepare and prevent.

Rather than waiting for the Federal government to arrive and save the day after 9/11, I applaud the initiative of State and locals to figure out what data they need and how to get it to protect their people.

I think everyone recognizes that fusion centers hold tremendous promise – and the Department of Homeland Security and the FBI are no exception.

Both have begun stationing hundreds of their employees on site to assist in fusion center efforts.

The Members of this Subcommittee have been strong supporters as well – together, we have visited four fusion centers in Los Angeles, Seattle, Denver, and Baltimore and plan to see more.

We also made sure that the recently enacted 9/11 Recommendations Act includes tools that DHS needs to help fusion centers with their information sharing missions both locally and nationally.

Our purpose in drafting the legislation this way was a simple one: to encourage the Department to PARTNER more effectively with fusion centers and the FBI and other entities located there – not to dictate to them about who should be doing what.

While fusion centers have great potential, we acknowledge that they are not without their challenges, and that's why we're here today.

I commend CRS and GAO for the helpful research they've done on fusion centers – research that can help us structure useful Federal roles going forward.

CRS and GAO have both raised common issues about the fusion center future that need clear answers:

The absence of a national strategy. Many fusion centers are essentially co-location centers. They lack skills and resources to develop or disseminate accurate, actionable, and timely information they need to protect their communities.

The lack of sustainable resources.

The lack of a common baseline – one that consistently focuses people on figuring out what facts they need to protect against particular threats.

After reading the reports, I am baffled why DHS and the FBI still haven't consolidated their multiple information sharing systems so fusion center staff doesn't need to log on to three, four, or five different networks to determine what threats they're waking up to each morning.

The Department promised us earlier this year that it would be looking into ways to make the HSIN and RISSNET to work together better. I hope Mr. Tomarchio on our second panel will have a progress report for us.

The reports also raise other very important questions --

About privacy and civil liberties training – a subject we have probed in prior hearings; and

The disturbing fact that DHS and the FBI don't recognize each other's security clearances at fusion centers – leaving State and locals scratching their heads about what additional hoops they have to jump through to access classified information.

All of us hope for success – and this hearing should move us forward.

Before turning to our witnesses, I have one message.

In addition to the provisions on fusion centers, the 9/11 Act included a framework for the Interagency Threat Assessment and Coordination Group – the ITACG – at the National Counterterrorism Center.

The ITACG is a simple, common sense idea that could make information sharing dramatically better by stationing police and sheriffs' officers side by side with NCTC analysts – helping the Feds learn what intelligence matters to law enforcement, how to write it in a way that adds value, and who in law enforcement needs to see it.

Although we intended the Department's Office of Intelligence and Analysis to take the lead with getting the ITACG up and running, that's not happening.

Instead, we're heard that DHS is now quibbling over whether to sign a Memorandum of Agreement on the ITACG – one that every stakeholder, including the Department, agreed to this summer.

Yesterday, the Chairman, the Ranking Member of the Full Committee, Dave Reichert, and I sent a letter to Secretary Michael Chertoff urging the Department to sign the MOA.

I was happy to hear from the Deputy Secretary late yesterday that he would be signing the ITACG MOA either last night or this morning.

Jane to Michael: please make sure that that happens. The Department must get to work on making the ITACG the robust information sharing entity the nation so urgently requires.

Welcome to you all.