

Statement

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Director, Alabama Department of Homeland Security

House Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Management, Investigations, and Oversight

**“You Don't Know What You Don't Know: Has the
Department of Homeland Security Improved its Ability to
Maintain Situational Awareness Since Hurricane Katrina?”**

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

As Director of the Alabama Department of Homeland Security, one of my responsibilities is to administer the State Homeland Security Grant Program appropriated by Congress and managed through the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Since its creation on June 18, 2003, the Alabama Department of Homeland Security has administered four fiscal years of federal homeland security grant dollars totaling \$115 million (\$34.5 million in FY03, \$36.8 million in FY04, \$28.1 million in FY05, and \$15.6 million in FY06).

I would like to express my gratitude to the Congress, President Bush, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security for the homeland security grants we've received in Alabama. It is my belief the receipt and responsible distribution of these grant funds in Alabama has saved lives and effectively served our citizens. Thank you for making these grants available.

With homeland security grant dollars and the visionary leadership of Governor Bob Riley, Alabama has built 54 regional mutual aid teams to provide standardized prevention, response, and recovery capabilities. We've improved interoperable communications capabilities among public safety disciplines. We've exponentially improved information sharing and situational awareness within our criminal justice, law enforcement, emergency management, and public safety communities. We are able to provide specialized prevention and response equipment to any law enforcement agency in the state. We've conducted exercises and training events to test our capabilities, and we've built teams of stakeholders in each of our 67 counties so that everyone can contribute to making our citizens safer.

The heart of our state homeland security program is having the tactics, techniques, and procedures in place that will ensure first responders and decision makers have the right information and the right equipment available when they need it. Advances in situational awareness and asset management have experienced a sea change of improvements in Alabama during the past four years.

Within our response and recovery community, the Alabama Emergency Management Agency uses EMITS (Emergency Management Information Tracking System), a Lotus Notes-based software.

EMITS provides a platform local and state agencies use to monitor operational information, make requests for personnel and resources, and track the status of existing requests for support. Situational awareness reports are forwarded to our Regional Operations Center in Thomasville, Georgia, daily or as requested. If we anticipate an incident cannot be met with existing state resources, a FEMA liaison is dispatched to our State Emergency Operations Center to coordinate the federal response. We believe it is imperative that the federal government not deploy assets or resources without first coordinating with the state.

The ability for public safety officials to reliably communicate using radio networks is essential to gaining and maintaining a clear situational picture. Alabama has enhanced interoperable radio communications by upgrading existing systems and utilizing a common bridging platform to connect disparate

radio systems across the state. Investing in one comprehensive statewide radio system with a common platform was not an affordable option for us. Instead, we leveraged technology by installing frequency bridges in each of Alabama's 67 counties. This allows local agencies using different frequency bands to communicate. During a large-scale event where local interoperability can become overwhelmed, we have positioned eight regional communications vehicles throughout Alabama. In addition to having bridging technology, these vehicles have satellite communication connectivity, Internet access, and streaming video cameras.

In Alabama we have developed an effective situational awareness framework in which to manage public/private sector programs and operational data. The program is called Virtual Alabama. It is an affordable visualization tool using Google Earth technology that employs the power of a secure Internet-based application to make a positive, immediate difference to first responders. The advantage to our first responder population is that Virtual Alabama is free for their use, and inexpensive to the state. Local and state officials can layer and tailor secure information about their jurisdictions

and feed it into a broader database that will give state and federal decision makers valuable and timely information.

With existing state GIS (Geographic Information System) and orthophotographic data, we are able to transform massive amounts of useful information into a common operational picture. Examples of real-time applications include emergency evacuation routing, vehicle and asset tracking, critical infrastructure mapping, plume modeling, real-time sensor feeds, real-time streaming video, risk visualization, and post-event imagery placed alongside pre-event imagery.

Virtual Alabama is less than a year old, yet we've already incorporated data from more than half of Alabama's 67 counties. To date, we have more than 1,085 subscribers using Virtual Alabama, and hope to have all 67 counties participating by the end of 2007.

Finally, Alabama has made remarkable strides toward improving information sharing and situational awareness within our criminal justice and public safety community. We've wisely invested our LETPP (Law Enforcement Terrorism Prevention Program) homeland security grant

funding to upgrade outdated 1980s-era flat file computer architecture. Alabama's hard-wired terminal architecture has now been replaced with a real-time, 21st century Internet-based system available to all 850 statewide law enforcement agencies, law enforcement officials, and other emergency responders throughout the state. This improved capability also includes a homeland security reporting system for providing information from the "cop on the beat" to our information fusion capability. We can take NCIC (National Crime Information Center) information and other criminal justice information and transmit it electronically to law enforcement officers with data terminals or any type of cell phone, Blackberry, or other personal digital assistant device. Additionally, this service is free of charge to local law enforcement and encourages their participation in sharing, gathering, and disseminating information.

In the weeks and months ahead, Alabama will continue to develop and identify new requirements and systems to better serve our citizens. However, we must be able to rely upon federal assistance via the State Homeland Security Grant Program to further our efforts. We've made great strides, but important work remains.

Thank you again for the privilege of appearing before you. I look forward to addressing any questions you may have.