

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson****“The State and Local Fusion Center Program:  
Advancing Information Sharing While  
Safeguarding Civil Liberties”**

March 14, 2007 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Intelligence, Information Sharing, and Terrorism Risk Assessment Subcommittee hearing entitled “The State and Local Fusion Center Program: Advancing Information Sharing While Safeguarding Civil Liberties”:

“The central role that fusion centers are and should be playing in improving information sharing cannot be overstated. The Department must work together with its law enforcement, first responder, and private sector partners at the State and local levels if we are ever to have a truly safer homeland. They are often in the best position to know what their information needs are and what intelligence would be most useful to them for figuring out where to spend their resources. That’s what intelligence is all about: if it can’t tell us what to prepare for and how, what good is it?”

Fusion centers were launched by State and local leaders themselves to get a handle on these and other issues, and I commend your office, Mr. Allen, for the “customer service” approach it has taken in this regard. That approach strikes the right balance between showing respect for the hard work that the States and locals already have done with fusion centers while at the same time showing how the Department can help them going forward. But we can’t help you help the fusion centers, Mr. Allen, if we don’t know what you need.

I hope you’ll be forthcoming about the challenges ahead for your State and Local Fusion Center Program given the President’s Fiscal Year 2008 budget request. I hope you’ll also be able to give us a sense of where you plan to deploy your resources as part of that Program.

Mississippi is in the process of planning a fusion center, and I imagine it could have played a key role in saving lives in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. How your Program will help improve situational awareness in the Gulf Region is of great interest to me. Moreover, I agree wholeheartedly with Ms. Harman that fusion centers must keep the faith with the American people. Privacy and civil liberties must be a centerpiece of the Department’s efforts at State and local fusion centers.”

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