

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson****“Consolidating the Department: An Update on the St. Elizabeths Project”**

March 26, 2009 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Management, Investigations, and Oversight Subcommittee hearing entitled “Consolidating the Department: An Update on the St. Elizabeths Project”:

“I would first like to thank Chairman Carney for holding this important hearing and for being at the forefront of an issue that I am sure will require this Committee’s rigorous oversight.

Since the Department of Homeland Security was created in 2002, the Department has had 7 of its core components spread out among 85 buildings in 53 separate locations.

As one would assume, this separation has adversely affected the need for cohesive communication, coordination, and cooperation across Department component agencies as the Department seeks to fulfill its mission.

It has also had an impact on the Department’s ability to create the “One DHS” culture that Secretary Napolitano referred to in her testimony last month before the full committee.

Moreover, fifty-five percent of the Department’s square footage is federally owned and under the control of the Department; however, 41 percent is leased through GSA.

Excluding the Coast Guard, Department components lease approximately 71 percent of its real property, a rate that is higher than any other rate government-wide.

The majority of these leases will expire over the next ten years. According to GAO, building ownership—rather than leases—saves money in the long run. It is for these basic reasons, that there is a great need for the Department to consolidate its physical infrastructure into one central location.

A single unified headquarters that houses the Secretary, senior Department leadership, component heads, and program managers, will significantly aid the Department in fulfilling its mission.

With 176 acres and over 60 available buildings, the West Campus of the St. Elizabeths Hospital appears to be the most logical place to house the Department’s vast headquarters operations.

The federal government already owns the space, the buildings are sitting empty, and the site is strategically located less than three miles from the U.S. Capitol and downtown DC.

While I agree that the consolidation plan and the location are excellent, I do however have some concern about the cost. It is estimated that this will be \$3.4 billion undertaking.

Unfortunately, the Department has not always carried out large scale procurement projects in a cost effective and timely manner. Staffing shortages, overspending, and overdependence on contractors has led to numerous examples of waste, fraud and abuse.

Moreover, small and disadvantaged businesses have all too often but left out of the process. Hopefully, as the Department and GSA move forward in this joint effort, and I commend you on how well you have worked together thus far, these past shortcomings will not materialize.”

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