

Statement of Hon. Richard H. Berdnik

United States House of Representative Homeland Security Committee

Sheriff of Passaic County

I would to thank the Chairman of the Homeland Security Committee, the Chairs, and members of the Sub-Committees meeting here today for the opportunity to appear in front of this joint panel.

I want to commend Chairman King and my Congressman Bill Pascrell for their leadership in this issue and their sponsorship of WMD PREVENTION AND PREPAREDNESS ACT OF 2011. I have seen Congressman Pascrell's continued leadership on this issue and I personally want to thank and commend his efforts.

On January 1, 2011, I had the privilege of becoming the Sheriff of Passaic County. Passaic County is a jurisdiction of a half million people, encompassing 185 square miles outside of the City of New York in Northern New Jersey. Prior to becoming Sheriff, I was a Detective

Lieutenant with the Clifton Police Department for almost 30 years and served as the SWAT Team Commander. During my tenure with the Clifton Police Department I became a first responder to the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. In addition to being one of the worst days in our nation's history, I saw firsthand the deficiencies that our emergency responders faced. That day thousands of brave law enforcement officers and emergency responders were called into service and showed great courage and commitment to our country.

Unfortunately, there were many obstacles to overcome. We did not have the proper equipment, training, and the ability to communicate during this horrific event. As the years have gone by, some of those issues have been addressed, but many have not been completely mitigated. It is amazing that almost 10 years ago, the issues I observed then still plague local public safety agencies.

The passage of this bill is essential for our nation. Nationally it is important that our government has a system in place for preventing and working through a WMD incident. It is equally important that public safety in general has a system to address these issues and resources to protect our citizens.

In New Jersey alone, the Homeland Security grants are slated to be reduced by 50 percent this fiscal year. That is not only short sighted, but a **dangerous public policy decision**. In Passaic County, the Sheriff's Office benefits greatly from the funding provided through the **Urban Areas Security Initiative**. The Sheriff's Office deploys certified CBRNE/ HAZMAT, Bomb Squad, and SWAT Teams as defined by NIMS (**National Incident Management System**). The ability to train and equip these teams properly is a direct result of the funding provided by UASI. These proposed reductions in funding will be devastating. They will cripple the ability of these teams to respond in times of emergency. I understand that members of this panel share my concerns. In fact, just recently I read an article in Government

Security News where Representative Bennie Thompson, the ranking member of the Homeland Security Committee, expressed these exact sentiments.

Additionally, the Sheriff's Office supports the County Health agencies in bioterrorism and provides CBRNE detection and security for Points of Distribution. Funding is needed to test and evaluate these PODs to ensure their efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of vaccines and medication during emergencies. We must also ensure that first responders are equipped with the latest technology available to support this mission.

Unfortunately deficiencies in communication are still an ongoing problem in much of the State of New Jersey. With the current trend moving toward shared dispatch services it is important to ensure that funding to enhance interoperable communications is provided. Initiatives like SAFECOM are consistent with fulfilling the objectives of the National

Emergency Communications Plan. As demonstrated in the 9-11 Attacks and other national disasters, the inability for first responders to effectively communicate with each other, led to substantial loss of life. Funding must be allocated to purchase additional frequencies in the D-block spectrum. This will enable the deployment of the nationwide broadband network for first responders.

Finally, there is no universal means to quickly and efficiently notify the public of impending emergencies. There exists a patchwork of communication systems where agencies currently deploy their own methods to notify their respective citizens and responders. Currently no comprehensive technology exists to broadcast a message to all of the residents of Passaic County. This needs to be corrected and the only way to mitigate this dangerous situation is through the availability of federal funding. This initiative will allow for the deployment of a universal emergency alert system.

The introduction of this bill moves our nation to establish a dialogue to ensure we are safe from any future attacks. This legislation helps address deficiencies in agency planning, coordination and training that our nation so badly needs to address. Though these issues cannot be solved with money alone, our nation needs to put the appropriate resources toward the problem.

Again, I want to thank the Committee, its Chairman and Congressman Pascrell for the opportunity to speak here today. As a law enforcement professional, I am proud to be part of this panel and I feel that our collective experience can assist in crafting the appropriate public policy to make our nation safer from a potential weapon of mass destruction attack.

Thank you for this opportunity and I look forward to addressing any concerns that the Committee might have.