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**Committee on Homeland Security's Subcommittee
On Counterterrorism and Intelligence**

Concerning:

**"Beyond Borders: Are the Department of Homeland Security's International
Agreements
Ensuring Actionable Intelligence to Combat Threats to the U.S. Homeland"**

Statement of Sheriff James R Voutour

County of Niagara
5526 Niagara Street Ext
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Buffalo, New York

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the subcommittee, I am James R. Voutour, the elected sheriff of Niagara County, New York. I have been a law enforcement professional for the past 20 years and sheriff for the past 3 and a half years. As the chief law enforcement official in Niagara County, I am responsible for keeping the peace and protecting the citizens of Niagara County. It is my honor to be asked to testify here today, and I thank you for the privilege.

As you know, Niagara County is located in the northwest corner of New York State. The combined population for the Buffalo- Niagara region is 1.35 million before a single tourist enters the region. What is unique about our county is that we share an international border with Canada to our west, to our north and a small portion to our south. In total, there are approximately 40 miles of international border we are charged with protecting. We are host to one of the wonders of the world with Niagara Falls, attracting millions of tourists from around the world yearly. We have 3 international ports of entry in Niagara County: the Rainbow Bridge, the Whirlpool Bridge and the Lewiston- Queenston Bridge. These bridges account for a large portion of traffic into the United States and are among the most active bridges in the country. More than 14 million people cross the bridges into the Buffalo- Niagara area on an annual basis. There are 7000 commercial vehicles crossing the international bridges on a daily basis. A single, significant incident occurring on any of these bridges would result in a nationwide "hardening" of all international traffic, resulting in an immediate economic impact throughout North America.

I mention our international bridges first for good reason. Niagara County sits just 30 miles south of the Greater Toronto area. The Greater Toronto area is home to nearly six million people, of which nearly half are recent immigrants. The population in and around Toronto continues to grow at a rapid pace making Toronto one of the most multi-cultural cities on Earth. Toronto has also become the destination for refugees from strife-torn countries in the Middle East. Many of these citizens travel across our international bridges on a regular basis to take advantage of comparatively lower prices and less tax at our shopping malls and to continue on to northeast cities such as New York and Washington DC. Local law enforcement is the second line of defense in supporting federal agencies such as Custom and Border Protection and Border Patrol in their mission of insuring that all those desiring entry to the United States are properly screened at our established ports of entry. The loss or UASI funding will greatly diminish our ability to maintain this working relation, particularly with our Canadian partners.

Niagara County is also home to the Niagara Power Project, the largest producer of electricity in New York State, generating 2.4 million kilowatts of power. The economic impact of a terrorist attack at the Niagara Power Plant would be catastrophic for not only New York, but also the entire Northeast and Canada. The Buffalo-Niagara region has long been home to a large number of plants in the electro-petro-chemical industry. There are more than 50 facilities that produce, store and ship extremely hazardous materials in our region alone. These materials are transported daily throughout the region by truck and train making the area vulnerable to a catastrophic event.

The mission of the Buffalo/ Erie/ Niagara Urban Area Work Group is to maximize the efforts of jurisdictions located in the Buffalo, Erie and Niagara areas to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from acts of terrorism and events involving weapons of mass destruction and naturally occurring catastrophic events.

UASI funding has allowed our region to train, equip, practice and prepare for such events described in our mission statement. Our expertise was put to the test with the crash of flight 3407, the Gowanda floods of 2009 and the October storm of 2006. The funding also allows Niagara County to participate in regional, federal tasks forces throughout the region. Our sheriff's office currently

assigns full time investigators to the Buffalo FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF), the FBI's regional computer forensics lab, the Buffalo Office of the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and the FBI's cyber task force. Conversely, the Buffalo Office of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), the Army Counter-Intelligence Unit and Customs and Border Protection all assign an agent to the Niagara County Drug Task Force. I cannot stress enough the importance I place on having the ability to assign my staff to these task forces to protect our region. You may remember the arrest and conviction of the Lackawanna Six in the spring of 2002. This discovery and arrest was a direct result of the JTTF Task force and a Niagara County Sheriff's Investigator played a key role in the investigation.

Mr. Chairman, the continuing success of this task force needs three key pieces. First, we must have a dedicated pool of highly experienced local law enforcement officials; second, we need highly skilled leadership and third, the financial resources that the federal government can provide. Niagara County is facing a shrinking budget once again in 2013. The recent elimination of the Buffalo-Niagara UASI group greatly diminishes the ability to protect our borders. We need to continue to plan, equip and practice to protect our citizens. We also need to continue to improve inter-operable communications for our first responders and build fusion centers with our Canadian partners to share real time intelligence. I fear that these financial cuts will quickly bring the Buffalo- Niagara region back into pre-9-11 times.

Mr. Chairman, I applaud the committee for the work you have embarked on to protect our borders. Your support in Washington is greatly needed and appreciated by the Buffalo/ Niagara region. I believe that if we work together, we will be able to uphold our oath to serve and protect and the Buffalo- Niagara group will be able to fulfill its mission statement. Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee. I will close with a quote from President Obama.

"We cannot continue to rely only on our military in order to achieve the national security objectives that we've set. We've got to have a civilian national security force that's just as powerful, just as strong, just as well-funded." Mr. Chairman and members of Congress, we are your civilian national security force. Thank you