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Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)
From Boston to Austin: Lessons Learned on Homeland Threat
Information Sharing

April 18, 2018

I thank Chairman McCaul for holding today's hearing on homeland threat information sharing in the wake of the Austin bombings and just after the fifth anniversary of the Boston Marathon bombing. I join my colleagues in remembering those who lost their lives in these tragic attacks and in keeping their families, friends, and loved ones in our prayers.

I wrote to Chairman McCaul last month requesting a hearing on the events in Austin. I did so because it is imperative that we examine attacks on the homeland closely, no matter the ideology or motivation driving them, to better identify and disrupt future attacks. Information sharing failures that contributed to the 9/11 terrorist attacks are well documented.

Since that time, the Federal government has made enormous strides in addressing those failures not only by improving information sharing among its own departments and agencies, but also with state and local partners. These state and local law enforcement agencies are, in many ways, our eyes, ears, and boots on the ground in our communities.

As such, they are an essential part of our homeland security information sharing apparatus, participating in fusion centers and Joint Terrorism Task Forces across the country, as well as in more informal information sharing mechanisms with law enforcement counterparts on an everyday basis.

That said, we know there is always room for continued improvement. Shortly after the Boston bombing, it is my understanding that a directive was sent from FBI headquarters to the field intended to ensure better information sharing with Federal, state, and local law enforcement.

I am interested in understanding the effects of that directive, and whether the police chiefs in Boston, Austin, and Washington, D.C. believe it is being implemented still today. I hope they will also share their thoughts on how we can take the lessons learned not just from 9/11 or Boston, but also the recent events in Austin, and use them to redouble our information sharing efforts to better secure the homeland.

For the Federal witnesses, I hope they will speak to their commitment to information sharing not just in generalities, but with concrete examples about how the FBI and ATF can improve

information sharing and better assess the effectiveness of our existing initiatives. Finally, I would be remiss if I did not point out the importance of homeland security grants, like UASI, to local communities' ability to prevent and respond to the kinds of attacks we saw in Boston and Austin.

Without these dollars, many cities and towns lack the resources to provide the equipment and training necessary to respond effectively. I have been greatly disappointed by President Trump's proposed cuts to these vital programs, but remain committed to supporting much-needed homeland security grants to communities across this country.

Whether terrorism, continued incidents of gun violence in our schools, or other attacks on the homeland, we need to do our part to provide the resources necessary to keep Americans safe and secure.

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Media contact: Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978

