



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers: Preparing America's Law Enforcement to Protect the Homeland

May 16, 2019

As it is National Police Week, I would like to take a moment to thank those law enforcement officers who serve this country and state and local communities and also honor those in law enforcement who have made the ultimate sacrifice.

The Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers, or FLETC, are a critical component of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and serve an important function for our nation's law enforcement community at large. FLETC prepares the federal law enforcement community to safeguard the American people, with more than 70,000 students receiving training at FLETC annually.

FLETC has grown over the years to include a number of facilities. If you are a new law enforcement officer joining the United States Border Patrol or the Federal Air Marshal Service, you will attend basic training at FLETC's facility in Chairwoman Torres Small's district in Artesia, New Mexico. A new recruit joining ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations or Homeland Security Investigations will attend basic training at FLETC's headquarters in Glynco, Georgia. And if you are a law enforcement officer in the National Capital Region, you will likely attend refresher and advanced training at FLETC's facility nearby in Maryland. Overall, FLETC oversees training for approximately 100 law enforcement organizations.

Needless to say, it is critical that FLETC conduct training in a manner that will prepare law enforcement trainees for the challenges they will face in the field. As the country's threat landscape evolves, FLETC must adapt so that its trainings meet the specific needs of its partners. On this front, I am encouraged that FLETC recently produced a Strategic Plan that highlights the need for coordination with its partners in designing, developing, and evaluating its training programs.

Despite the best of intentions, FLETC faces coordination challenges with its partners and a lack of resources. Some of these challenges were identified in a November 2018 DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) report. For example, scheduling for approximately 100 partner organizations at 700 sites is a heavy lift and depends greatly on FLETC's partners' ability to accurately predict their training needs for the upcoming year. Given the limited resources and ongoing demand for training, partners compete for use of the same training facilities. According to the OIG, FLETC has identified at least eight facilities that exceed their capacity. In those cases, partners occasionally have to use backup sites that lack the same capabilities or training features. For example, one backup site does not have a stairwell, which precludes training on navigating such a setting. The OIG also noted that backup sites may be less safe. In one such case, a warehouse at the Artesia facility was damaged by a vehicle in 2009 and was not repaired until after the OIG identified safety risks in 2017.

This raises concerns about whether FLETC has practices in place and resources necessary to ensure that its infrastructure is properly maintained. Indeed, maintenance and repair of FLETC's infrastructure is critical to its success. But during hiring surges, it becomes more challenging for FLETC to complete this work.

If Customs and Border Protection succeeds in its proposed hiring surge, the Department must have a plan to ensure FLETC does not get overwhelmed by additional trainees, exacerbating existing scheduling and infrastructure challenges. I look forward to hearing more from the Acting Inspector General on the challenges FLETC faces and opportunities for improvement. I also look forward to hearing from FLETC on the steps it is taking to deliver its training in an efficient and safe manner and to ensure that law enforcement officers are receiving the best possible training to address the challenges they will face in the field.

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