

Ranking Member Kathleen Rice Opening Statement

Counterterrorism and Intelligence Subcommittee Hearing

Combating Transnational Gangs Through Information Sharing

Thursday, January 18, 2018

In June of 2017, we held a similar hearing on how we can both combat transnational gang violence on Long Island, while empowering young people with the knowledge, support and resources they need to reject gangs in our communities.

As we find ourselves here to discuss a similar topic again, I hope that today's discussion will include a broad look at transnational criminal organizations around the world.

As we all know, MS-13, the 18th Street Gang, and rival gangs are criminal organizations who commit brutal acts of violence and have taken too many lives. They, like other transnational gangs are organizations that revel in violence, crave fear, and terrorize the communities in which they live and operate and recruit their members.

As the former Nassau County District Attorney, I've seen firsthand how vicious and unrepentant these gangs are. I've seen MS-13 and 18th Street Gang members laugh at the judge as they were sentenced to life in prison or deported.

So I want the record to be clear, I believe all violent criminals should be punished to the full extent of the law. I believe that violent criminals who are in this country illegally should be deported and prevented from ever coming back. I believe that dismantling violent criminal organizations like MS-13 must be a priority for law enforcement officials and lawmakers at all levels.

However, I also know for a fact that the vast majority of immigrants in this country are not criminals – they are usually the victims of crime rather than the perpetrators.

I know and understand that you cannot destroy a gang like MS-13 without the help of immigrant communities. You need members of the community to talk to you, provide information, report crimes – and for that, they need to trust you.

They need to know that stepping forward to help will not lead to them being detained and deported and ripped away from their families.

I will remind the Committee and my Republican colleagues that many of the members of MS-13 are, in fact, immigrants and children and descendants of immigrants that have become victims of gang threats, violence, recruitment.

More, it is clear to me that President Trump, Attorney General Sessions, and Republicans in Congress have sought and continue to use the threat of MS-13 to justify their push to build a wall on the southern border and round up and deport millions of immigrants – including those whose only crime is being in this country without paperwork.

Last week, President Trump and DHS Secretary Nielsen, made another shameful, anti-immigrant decision by ending temporary protected status for 31, 000 Salvadoran TPS holders in New York, which will send families back to a country that is overrun with gang violence and drug trafficking.

This decision came on the heels of the Trump Administration's decision to end DACA and temporary protected status for Haitians and Nicaraguans

Republicans have made it clear that they are not concerned about the destabilizing effects that such U.S. policies will have on communities like the ones Chairman King and I serve on Long Island.

On average TPS recipients in our state have lived in the United States for an average of 21 years. They are our neighbors, our friends, and our coworkers.

I recognize this hearing isn't about TPS, but I also recognize a Republican-controlled Congress doesn't want to negotiate, so I have to use every platform I have to address this issue.