

TESTIMONY

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY & GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
Wednesday, July 23, 2008

OPENING COMMENTS

Senator Lieberman, Senator Collins and members of the Committee, good morning and thank you for inviting me here today. My name is James M. Thomas and I am the Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security. I am here to talk to you about the Intelligence Reform Act of 2004.

I do want to tell you that in my 39 years of law enforcement experience I have never seen such a strong willingness to share information among the local, regional, state and federal partners. It is clear that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has been working very closely with state entities in developing strong collaborative teams in this regard. I have participated in and have seen the benefit of this collaborative approach not only in Connecticut but also throughout the country. DHS has set standards for information sharing. Most states and large urban areas have been moving towards the adoption and implementation of important standards. In the field these standards specify what are known as “Fusion Centers” or “Intelligence Centers.” DHS has been a leader in providing training, expertise and assistance to all of the 50 states and U.S. Territories regarding intelligence centers in an effort to further develop this critical mission, which when successful will help prevent terrorist attacks from abroad or home grown.

The key to effective terrorism prevention activities is “good” timely intelligence. The motto of intelligence sharing should be... “Gather” – “Evaluate” - “Analyze” and then “Share” information. I can tell you that in our part of the country information sharing has never been better. For example... This past week and every week, intelligence information is shared with 169 municipalities in our state and it includes information from local law enforcement, State Police, Department of Corrections and federal agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) , the U.S. Coast Guard and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The Connecticut Intelligence Center (CTIC) weekly bulletin also has information from the states of New York, Rhode Island, Massachusetts and New Hampshire.

In addition, to the weekly bulletin, we can issue daily and hourly bulletins, if needed and appropriate. The officers in the field can and do receive this material on their mobile data terminals within their police vehicles. Clearly this is critical as the end user the officer, trooper or other law enforcement professional needs to have timely, vetted credible information in order to do their job effectively. There is too much at risk if we do not share the information with them, as they are the men and women who are on the front lines and serve as the best means of preventing or stopping a terrorist incident from happening.

Coming from a local law enforcement agency and serving in that capacity as a Chief of Police in two communities, I truly believe that the most effective and efficient means of gathering information and ultimately using that information MUST be done at the local level. In Connecticut we have accomplished this by establishing five (5) Regional Intelligence Officers (RILOS) whose job is to gather and exchange information between the local level and CTIC.

This past week and every week as I speak with local law enforcement, they have indicated that the information sharing they receive has never been as good as it is at this time. This is truly the efforts of everyone, especially with the efforts of Charlie Allen and his team at DHS. Mr. Allen, as you know, brings many years of credible intelligence sharing experience to the table and through his efforts and the efforts of other federal agencies, they have been assisting the local and state agencies in meeting the standards of information sharing.

In addition, we also believe that we need to fully engage the “Private Sector” and again through the efforts of DHS we have been able to develop a weekly bulletin for the private sector that is hosted on the secure Homeland Security Information Network (HSIN) that provides them with very timely open-source information at the local, state, regional, national and international levels. We believe that this sharing of information with the private sector will again pay dividends as we have a very active collaborative relationship with the private sector.

Clearly times have changed. The threat for terrorism related activities is real and a constant concern. So the way we do business needed to change. This change is now taking place... We believe and hope that your committee will continue to support and fund the fusion/intelligence centers that have been developed and will support our goal of having well trained intelligence analysts from the federal, state and local agencies working side-by-side analyzing the information and intelligence they receive and most importantly... disseminating it back out to the street where it needs to be shared to have the most profound impact.

This past March the Department of Homeland Security in partnership with the Department of Justice sponsored a National Fusion Center Conference. All 50 states and several of the U.S. Territories attended the conference and it was clear that we need to continue in the direction of sharing credible information in a timely manner. Together we can and will make a difference. We do need to work together like we've never done before in order to make the entire United States and world a safer place. We need to work together to get the information to the most effective agents of change, our local first responders, whom I call our "First Preventers."

Again, thank you for giving me an opportunity to share my thoughts with you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.