**Opening Statement**

**Ranking Member Gerald E. Connolly (VA-11)**

**Subcommittee on Government Operations
Hearing on “Firearms Lost: GSA’s Administration**

**of the Surplus Firearm Donation Program”**

**March 2, 2016**

Thank you Mr. Chairman, for holding a hearing on the serious problem of the lost and missing firearms that have been donated to state and local law enforcement agencies through the GSA Surplus Firearm Donation Program.

The numbers are astounding: 486 missing firearms since 1999, with 308 of them traded to firearms dealers without the required GSA approval.

In 2002 the New Ellenton, South Carolina Police Department traded five Uzi submachine guns it had received through this program to a gun shop for new equipment.  In 2012 the Cayce Police Department in South Carolina sold two grenade launchers it had received through this program to a firearms dealer in Tennessee.  GSA then lost track of these weapons.

Mr. Chairman, we agree on the fact that the missing weapons from this program are a problem.  But this is no ordinary problem.  **Can anybody tell me why the Cayce South Carolina Police Department, which polices a city of less than 13,000 people, needed two military-style grenade launchers in the first place?  Or why any civilian would need to own grenade launchers for hunting or self-defense?  This begs the question: Why do our gun control policies even allow for the purchase of a weapon designed for maximum destruction? The flaws in our country’s lax gun control policies are highlighted in the unbridled buying and selling of these dangerous weapons by just about anyone.**

  In the fall of 2014, federal programs that outfit state and local law enforcement agencies with weapons, military-style vehicles, and riot gear received heightened scrutiny when we saw disturbing images of heavily armed police officers during the protests in Ferguson, Missouri.

The GSA Firearms Donation Program is much smaller than some of the other programs.  It can serve a valid purpose - donating law enforcement service weapons to police departments to outfit officers with basic supplies.  It is not a program we need to end, but clearly it is one that needs reform.

**I commend President Obama for taking executive action last year to scale back the type of military equipment and heavy weaponry that are donated to local law enforcement agencies.  The Executive Order establishes standard procedures for all law enforcement acquisition programs and ensures local law enforcement agencies are trained in the proper use of controlled equipment.**  The President established a working group that reached out to stakeholders, including law enforcement and civil liberties groups, in an effort to strike the right balance between policing and civil rights.

The Inspector General also made recommendations to improve data management and the inventory process of these firearms.  Incredibly, the IG found that in some cases, records for this program were kept in paper form.  That is unbelievable considering the magnitude of this program and the potential consequence of these weapons getting in the wrong hands.

Without question tighter controls and additional reforms are necessary.  For example, yesterday, Committee staff asked the IG about what became of the missing grenade launchers.  We learned that they are currently for sale by gun dealers in Colorado and Florida.

There appear to be no consequences to the law enforcement agencies that violate the program.  It is my understanding that the Cayce Police Department only had to pay GSA fair market value for the weapons as restitution.  That is the full extent of the punishment for violating the terms of the weapons transfer.

And there is no provision I am aware of to recover federal weapons that have been put into general commerce by local police departments, in violation of the terms of their contracts with GSA.  I want to know today whether the GSA or the GSA IG intends to recover the grenade launchers.

**Some of my colleagues may disagree with me on whether or not the general public should be able to purchase grenade launchers.  Even if you disagree with me on that, surely you would agree that the sale of grenade launchers and hundreds of other weapons we donated to local police departments is an abuse of the program, pure and simple.**

Ms. Ochoa, as Inspector General, you are charged with rooting out waste, fraud, and abuse.  This seems like a prime example.  I thank you for the work you have already done to highlight the issues with this program.  I am curious to hear from all of you today what happens from here.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.