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Opening Statement Rep. Stephen F. Lynch, Ranking Member Subcommittee on National Security

Hearing on Combating Homegrown Terrorism July 27, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank you for holding this hearing to examine our efforts to combat violent extremism and terrorist radicalization. I'd also like to thank today's witnesses for helping this Subcommittee with its work.

The recapture of the City of Mosul by Iraqi forces earlier this month marked a significant development in the U.S.-led global coalition effort to degrade and destroy ISIS. The loss of Iraq's second largest city – coupled with ongoing advances by coalition-backed Syrian rebels in the self-declared ISIS capital of Raqqa in eastern Syria – are the most recent indicators of the continuing loss of physical territory by the terrorist organization. According to global data monitoring company IHS Markit, ISIS currently controls an estimated 13,980 square miles – an area roughly the size of Maryland. That's a 60 percent decrease from January 2015 when ISIS-controlled territory spanned an estimated 35,060 square miles. The terrorist group has also experienced a corresponding loss in annual revenue from approximately \$2 billion dollars in 2014 to less than \$870 million in 2016.

However, battlefield losses on the ground in Iraq and Syria do not signify the complete degradation or destruction of ISIS. As recently underscored by Lt. Gen. Michael Nagata of the National Counterterrorism Center, ISIS' ability to absorb this damage and continue to direct, enable, or inspire terrorist attacks worldwide indicates that *"we do not yet fully appreciate the scale or strength of this phenomenon."* In the midst of the coalition-backed offensive in Raqqa, the *New York Times* reports that top ISIS operatives have relocated to the town of Mayadeen, Syria, about 100 miles away, – along with the recruitment, financing, propaganda, and external operations functions necessary to facilitate and motivate attacks in the West.

Regrettably, we have already witnessed the devastation caused by ISIS-inspired ideology and the influence of extremist social media content here at home with the 2015 terrorist attack in San Bernardino, California that resulted in 14 deaths and the 2016 terrorist attack in Orlando, Florida that killed 49 people. The Program on Extremism at George Washington University has identified at least 16 successful attacks perpetrated in the United States alone since ISIS announced the so-called "caliphate" in 2014. The majority of the attackers, including Orlando shooter Omar Mateen, pledged their allegiance to ISIS.

In light of the continuing national security threat posed by terrorist-inspired attacks, we must work on a bipartisan basis to conduct robust oversight of federal efforts to combat violent extremism and maximize our ability to mitigate the threat of radicalization based on fact. As highlighted by the independent Government Accountability Office just this month in its report on *Countering ISIS and its Effects*, “the federal government does not have a cohesive strategy or process for assessing the countering violent extremism effort.” Moreover, programs designed to counter violent extremism at the federal level have lacked clear missions and objectives, received insecure or inadequate funding, and have failed to reflect meaningful and collaborative Muslim community engagement and input.

In 2014, the Obama Administration announced the establishment of key pilot programs in Minneapolis, Los Angeles, and my own City of Boston designed by the Department of Justice, the Department of Homeland Security, and the National Counterterrorism Center to counter violent extremism and stop radicalization through community-based outreach and education. As noted by then-Attorney General Eric Holder, the greater Boston region was selected as a pilot area as a result of pre-existing collaboration between law enforcement, non-governmental organizations, and local communities, including the Muslim community. In fact, President Obama recognized Boston as one of the ten cities where local elected officials, law enforcement, faith organizations, youth groups, and others have worked together to achieve marked improvements in community policing.

In the New England area, local Muslim community leaders and organizations occupy a strategic role to prevent online radicalization and other forms of terrorist recruitment and promote community engagement. The Islamic Center of New England - which includes a mosque in my congressional district located in the city of Quincy, Massachusetts – has sought to develop a faith-based curriculum for young people that educates them on the prevalence of misinformation on the internet and particularly, social media, while reinforcing positive Islamic values. In addition, Imam Khalid Nasr of the Quincy mosque has sought to increase community outreach and interaction through open houses designed to afford all members of the community the opportunity to visit the mosque and meet their Muslim neighbors.

Since the inception of the regional pilot programs, the federal Countering Violent Extremism program has expanded to include a grant program authorized by Congress to assist states, localities, and non-profit organizations in preventing terrorist recruitment and radicalization. As announced by Secretary of Homeland Security Gen. John Kelly in June of 2017, the agency awarded 26 grants totaling \$10 million to organizations dedicated to securing our communities and preventing terrorism. The list of grants includes an approximately \$485,000 allocation to the Boston Police Foundation – a non-profit organization that works with the Boston Police Department to implement innovative youth outreach programs. Unfortunately, the Trump Administration has frozen this \$10 million in funding and in its fiscal year 2018 budget, proposed zeroing out the \$50 million Countering Violent Extremism program altogether.

Rather than weakening our efforts to combat violent extremism, we must work together to identify what additional steps we must take to improve collaboration and cultivate a relationship of mutual respect and deeper understanding between law enforcement and local communities based on a shared commitment to preventing terrorist radicalization and

recruitment. To this end, I look forward to today's hearing and I yield back the balance of my time.

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