

The Honorable Rob Simmons
Chairman
U.S. House of Representatives
Homeland Security's Subcommittee on Intelligence, Information Sharing, and
Terrorism Risk Assessment
Thursday, September 7, 2006
Rayburn House Office Building

Good morning, my name is Amy Whitmore. I am an Analyst Supervisor with the Virginia State Police and am responsible for coordinating the activities of the analysts assigned to the Virginia Fusion Center. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding State and Local Fusion Centers and the role of DHS. I look forward to answering any questions posed by the Members of this Committee at the conclusion of this testimony.

The Virginia Fusion Center was established in February 2005 to fuse together key counter-terrorism resources from local, state, and federal agencies as well as private industry in a secure, centralized location, to facilitate information collection and sharing, in order to better defend the Commonwealth of Virginia against terrorist threats and/or attack. The Virginia Fusion Center is a cooperative effort between the Virginia State Police and Virginia Department of Emergency Management, with personnel from both agencies staffing the center on a 24 hour basis. There are also currently representatives from the Virginia National Guard and FBI, with future plans to staff full time representatives from the Virginia Department of Fire Programs and DHS.

In order to meet this mission, the Virginia Fusion Center has developed new partnerships with private industry and representatives of local, state, and federal government agencies having a mission critical role in homeland security, such as the health and transportation sectors. At the same time, we have strengthened existing relationships with law enforcement and military. These partnerships provide the foundation for the Virginia Fusion Center, but this foundation will weaken and eventually collapse without the critical exchange of information and intelligence to all appropriate partners in a timely manner. This is the utmost and critical need for the Virginia Fusion Center and involves several facets that will be discussed.

Currently, the Virginia Fusion Center must monitor on a daily basis several Federal and Regional Information Management Systems to gather and disseminate critical homeland security information and intelligence. These systems include the Homeland Security Information Network (HSIN), Law Enforcement Online (LEO), Federal Protective Services Secure Portal System, Joint Regional Information Exchange System (JRIES), Regional Information Sharing System (RISS), as well several other state and local systems. To ensure that all pertinent information and intelligence has been obtained, all of these systems must be monitored throughout the day, ultimately limiting the operational

effectiveness of the center by having personnel duplicate efforts and view often times redundant information.

To effectively prevent and respond to terrorist related incidents as well as help our partners meet their homeland security missions, it is imperative that one uniform federal system be adopted that allows all partners access based on appropriate clearances and provides real time information that is both classified and unclassified. While the majority of the aforementioned systems provide excellent finished intelligence products, they are lacking time sensitive tactical information and intelligence that is needed for management at all levels to effectively direct resources where they might be needed to address a potential threat.

In addition to having one federal system with timely information, it would also be beneficial to have one federal conduit from which to report and receive information, as it is often difficult for state and local centers to determine which federal agency should be notified and to whom to direct that information within that agency. Having one federal point of contact would eliminate any guesswork in forwarding information. This would ultimately benefit the information sharing process, because it would alleviate duplicate efforts and redundancy of information reporting by multiple agencies. It would also eliminate unnecessary efforts by state and local agencies to share information when it is not needed by a certain federal agency.

The Virginia Fusion Center has also encountered problems with the DHS policy to forward intelligence and information only to the state's Homeland Security Advisor, who does not have direct involvement with the Virginia Fusion Center and is not responsible for information sharing with other agencies. While the Homeland Security Advisor certainly should be provided with such information, it is critical that the Virginia Fusion Center and other local and state centers directly receive this information in a timely manner in order to ensure that appropriate actions are taken to include timely dissemination of information to Virginia Fusion Center partners.

Lastly, the Virginia Fusion Center's unique structure has also made it difficult to obtain security clearances that are recognized by various federal agencies for all personnel assigned to the center. Virginia State Police personnel receive clearances through the FBI. Personnel with the Virginia Department of Emergency Management, who have successfully undergone full Virginia State Police background checks and can view Law Enforcement Sensitive material, are unable to obtain clearances through the FBI and must obtain security clearances through DHS instead. In addition, our National Guard representative obtains their clearance through the Department of Defense. Since these clearances are obtained through several different Federal Agencies, there are additional steps that must be taken to ensure that each clearance is recognized by the other federal agencies. The Department of Homeland Security has also certified the

VFC Secure Conference Room as an open storage of classified information, not to exceed the Secret level, but the Department of Justice does not recognize this certification. These issues present major challenges to the operation of the Virginia Fusion Center, as operational effectiveness can be compromised if all personnel and facilities are not consistently cleared through the same process. The majority of State and Local agencies also have a limited amount of personnel that possess a federal security clearance. This makes it difficult to forward classified information and intelligence to our partners that do not possess these clearances. Information and Intelligence is still being over classified.

While I have addressed the needs of the Virginia Fusion Center to ensure its operational effectiveness as it relates to DHS and federal agencies, it should also be noted that the Virginia Fusion Center has been working with DHS to better the information sharing process. The Virginia Fusion Center has been involved in a pilot program aimed at information sharing at the state and local levels; however, the pilot program is one of many portals that require monitoring and it is not anticipated that this portal will become the only system to monitor. DHS is also in the process of providing the Homeland Secure Data Network (HSDN) for the Virginia Fusion Center. However, as HSDN can only be accessed by DHS and DOD personnel at this time, the benefit of having such a system wherein Virginia Fusion Center personnel cannot obtain access is limited. While these efforts are helpful and a step in the right direction, they do not remedy the problems addressed today.

In order to prevent the next terrorist attack from happening on U.S. soil, it is crucial that state and local agencies be provided with real time information that can be disseminated to their partners. Only when all agencies with mission critical roles in homeland security receive timely information will the U.S. be able to effectively disrupt and prevent terrorist attacks in the U.S.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input into this incredibly important process.