

Testimony

National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE)
Before U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security
September 8, 2015

Good morning Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Thompson and the honored members of the House Committee on Homeland Security. My name is Gregory Thomas and I am the National President of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, commonly referred to as NOBLE. I am pleased to bring you testimony this morning on behalf of our executive board and over three thousand members who we represent internationally, who are primarily African-American chief executive officers of law enforcement agencies at the federal, state, county and municipal levels. Since 1976, we are proud to have served as the “conscience of law enforcement” by taking steps to ensure that there is equity in the administration of justice to all communities in the United States.

In response to the seminal events in policing that have occurred in our country over the past year, NOBLE is proud to have played a central role in our nation’s efforts to improve the level of respect between police and the citizens they serve. Whether by serving as a key member of President Barack Obama’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing or working closely with the United States Department of Justice and its Office of Community Oriented Policing on the ground in Ferguson, Missouri, we have been an important part of the discourse that sought to bring a fresh look to the manner in which police *professionally* engage with the communities that they serve and in the manner that communities *respectfully* engage with the police that serve them.

As steps are being taken by this honored committee to revisit important lessons that have been learned in the post 9/11 world, NOBLE is pleased to provide this committee with a “view from the field” on the levels of cooperation between federal, state and local law enforcement agencies in their joint efforts to prevent, prepare for, respond to, mitigate, and recover from a terrorist attack.

As we approach the 14th date of recognition, NOBLE would like to first offer its heartfelt condolences to the families of the over 3,000 people who lost their lives on September 11, 2001. We would like to also thank the men and women of all of the public safety and law enforcement

agencies and everyday citizens who gallantly responded to the sites of the terrorist attacks both here in New York City, in Pennsylvania and at the Pentagon in Virginia.

The lessons learned from the terrorist attacks from September 11, 2001, a day which is commonly referred to as 9/11, are many, but arguably the most important one is that there must be an unified intelligence gathering effort always in place to ensure that we can properly identify plots and plans to attack our homeland and bring those who are behind these plans to quick and determined justice.

Recent statements from FBI Director Comey that The Islamic State group also known as ISIS or ISIL, poses a more challenging terror threat within the United States than al-Qaida does, highlights the need for us to keep our collective eyes open for those who will choose to act “singularly” to create terror, the likes of which was recently evidenced in the thwarted attempt in France. This ever present threat requires a top level effort on the part of our federal, state and local law enforcement officials, an effort that will be greatly enhanced if these officials are given the structure to function properly.

Fortunately since 9/11, there has been significant progress made in regards to information sharing between agencies, but in order to achieve a robust environment that actively promotes horizontal and vertical information sharing, NOBLE believes that properly resourced **intelligence fusion centers** can serve a dual purpose of combatting terrorism and fighting crime, thereby providing an excellent return on taxpayer investments.

In their 2006 issued guidelines on intelligence fusion centers, the Department of Justice defined a fusion center as “a collaborative effort of two or more agencies that provide resources, {and} information to the center with the goal of maximizing their ability to detect, prevent, investigate and respond to criminal and terrorist activity”.

Many of our members across the country either work in or have worked with these centers and as such have commented favorably about their ability to provide a forum wherein governmental and private sector entities can unite to maximize available resources, build trusted networks and relationships and thoroughly investigate and prevent criminal and terrorist activity,

With some of our cities recently experiencing upticks in crime, and with the general call for government to accomplish more with less, an expansion of these centers can serve to provide effective sources of timely intelligence related to violent gangs, drug trafficking, weapons smuggling, and other crimes that can have a nexus to violence.

While fusion centers have a viable place in the law enforcement and intelligence communities, NOBLE strongly recommends that their work continue to be subject to periodic independent review and be held to high standards, like those previously established by the Department of Justice for example, so as to minimize the chances of civil liberty or privacy abuses. An example of a properly functioning and resourced fusion center can be found in Georgia where in 2012, the **Georgia Information Sharing and Analysis Center** was named Fusion Center of the Year by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

In addition to creating and properly funding fusion centers, NOBLE also urges Congress to continue to support, create and fund grant programs to ensure that equipment that was purchased shortly after the 9/11 attacks, like those that were purchased for example to properly respond to Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and Explosive threats, (also known as **CBRNE** attacks) remain current and usable by our nation's first responders.

Lastly, we also recommend that a strong emphasis be made on providing objective technical assistance and support for those agencies who want to apply for homeland security grants and assistance, but because of their size and financial capacity, have difficulty employing grant writers on a short or long term basis.

On behalf of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, I thank you again for the opportunity to provide our views on this important and timely topic. I will remain and look forward to responding to your questions.