

July 19, 2022

The Honorable Gary C. Peters
Chairman

The Honorable Robert J. Portman
Ranking Member

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Peters and Ranking Member Portman,

We understand the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs may consider legislation this week. We respectfully urge you to include HR 6825, the “Nonprofit Security Grant Program Improvement Act of 2022.” The House agreed to the bipartisan bill on May 16th as a stand-alone measure, and again last week within the House-passed bipartisan National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 (HR 2900).

Mark up of HR 6825 is timely. The authorization in place does not address the ten-fold growth in the program since its inception, nor the complexity of today’s nonprofit threat environment. Twice this year, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has issued National Terrorism Advisory System bulletins warning the country to expect continued acts of violence against faith-based institutions, schools, and racial and religious minorities. Both warnings recommended the Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NSGP) as a critical resource to counter these threats.

The intent of the NSGP program’s current authorization was limited to codifying the elements of the existing program as established in FY 2005, expanding its geographic scope to include 56 states and territories, and establishing a baseline funding level of \$75 million.

As the program grew to 3400 applicants last year (FY 2021) and even more applicants this year (FY 2022), the program has not been without its challenges. The program lacks sufficient funding, management and administrative support, and resources to assist nonprofits as they go through the complicated NSGP application process. It needs to be more responsive to today’s increasingly complex threat landscape and to simplify and streamline the application and related materials.

This year, most nonprofits had a mere 7 days to complete and submit their grant applications to the State Administrative Agencies (SAAs), and FEMA had just 10 days to carry out multiple stages of review of more than 3500 applicants. Approximately 10 SAAs closed their states’ application periods before FEMA opened the grant opportunity. This is the state of the NSGP under the current authorization.

HR 6825 would address significant shortcomings of the program ahead of the FY 2023 program cycle, including increasing program stability and enhancing the homeland security committees’ oversight. The bill would:

- Authorize NSGP at \$500 million annually, FY 2023-FY 2028, giving the program the room it may need in case of further increase in risk and demand;
- Establish a dedicated NSGP program office at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS);

- Provide mechanisms for outreach, engagement, education, and technical assistance and support to help broaden the pool of eligible nonprofit applicants;
- Establish mechanisms for improved program management at the state and federal levels (including through dedicated resources), improving stewardship of tax dollars and congressional oversight over the program;
- Waive the Paperwork Reduction Act requirements for NSGP application and materials
- Provide authority to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to redirect unallocated funding between the NSGP-UA and NSGP-State programs as warranted so all funding is appropriately utilized;
- Introduce standardized base-line program administrative requirements across state agencies (including with respect to key application start and end dates relative to the release of the Notice of Funding Opportunity);
- Consider terrorist and other extremist threats to address the increasingly complex, diffuse, and dynamic threat landscape; and
- Provide for data collection to help measure program impact.

The timing to markup HR 6825 is urgent. The threats are not merely hypothetical:

- On June 22, 2022, FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell underscored the threats to the nonprofit sector and support for the NSGP program, during a hearing before this Committee on FEMA's strategic priorities, as she testified about the January 15, 2022, terrorist hostage standoff at the Congregation Beth Israel synagogue in Colleyville, Texas.
- On June 29, 2022, it was reported that Federal agents arrested Thomas Develin, 24, of Columbus, Ohio on charges related to making and selling "ghost guns," possessing homemade conversion devices to convert semi-automatic AR-15 rifles and Glock-type pistols into fully automatic machine guns, in possession of more than 25 firearms, and making antisemitic and violent threats while employed to provide security services at local synagogues and Jewish schools.
- On July 6, 2022, it was reported that a 15-year-old from Struthers, Ohio, was arrested on charges of making terroristic threats, domestic violence, inducing panic and possessing criminal tools. Police were tipped off by the FBI that the teen was on a live chat on the internet making threats. Police searched the home and found two loaded handguns along with several loaded magazines. Reports said there were over 100 rounds of ammunition, and the handguns were emblazoned with racist and Nazi slogans, including a swastika. Inside the phone, investigators found Nazi and anti-Semitic materials as well as a manifesto. They also found on the phone a video the teen made where he said he planned to kill his father, then shoot as many Black people as he could while driving to a synagogue, where he was going to carry out a mass shooting.

- Since May 3, 2022, there have been media reports of at least thirty separate incidents of property destruction at churches, including arson and threats graffitied on church walls, with one group that promoted these attacks pledging to engage in “increasingly extreme tactics.”

For these reasons, we respectfully urge you to include HR 6825, the “Nonprofit Security Grant Program Improvement Act of 2022” in this week’s markup. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The Jewish Federations of North America
ADL (Anti-Defamation League)
Agudath Israel of America
National Association of Evangelicals
Religions for Peace USA
Secure Community Network
Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America
USCCB Committee for Religious Liberty
US Council of Muslim Organizations