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Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

Federal Protective Service: Will Continuing Challenges Weaken Transition and Impede Progress?

November 18, 2009 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “Federal Protective Service: Will Continuing Challenges Weaken Transition and Impede Progress?”:

“We are here today to discuss the continuing challenges faced by the Federal Protective Service and how those challenges may affect its future.

The Federal Protective Service (FPS) is responsible for protecting federal government property, personnel, visitors, and customers by providing law enforcement and related security services for about 9,000 buildings that are under the control and custody of the General Services Administration (GSA).

FPS responds to incidents, conducts risk assessments, participates in security meetings with GSA property managers and tenant agencies, and determines whether GSA buildings meet security standards established by the Interagency Security Committee.

To carry out this mission, FPS currently employs about 1,200 Federal employees. About one-half of the FPS workforce are Federal Law Enforcement Security Officers (LESO). But those officers are not responsible for providing a law enforcement presence at federal facilities. On the contrary, these employees are dedicated to overseeing the 15,000 members of a contract guard workforce.

For most people, the contract guards are the face of the Federal Protective Service.

FPS officers, formerly major actors in federal law enforcement, have become primarily responsible for administration and management of a large and growing network of private guards.

And this trend is likely to continue. While Congress has mandated that FPS maintain staffing levels of at least 1200, GAO has found that the agency continues to have a high attrition rate.

And like most other federal agencies, FPS must address the impending retirements of the Baby-Boom generation. About 30 percent of FPS employees will be eligible to retire in the next 5 years.

These impending retirements combined with a high attrition rate indicate that FPS must implement a strategic human capital plan. Yet GAO has found that FPS does not have a strategic human capital plan.

The lack of a human capital plan could be mitigated by stellar oversight of its force of contract guards. But GAO has found that FPS does not effectively oversee training and performance of these guards. In fact, in one region, FPS failed to provide x-ray or magnetometer training to 1,500 guards since 2004. Nonetheless, these guards were assigned to posts at federal facilities.

In addition to training and oversight challenges, GAO has identified substantial security vulnerabilities in the FPS guard program. GAO investigators were able to successfully carry the IED components through security checkpoints monitored by contract guards in 10 out of 10

federal facilities it tested.

Failures in the guard program could be mitigated by accurate FPS assessments of risk and the implementation of countermeasures by GSA and its tenant agencies. However, GAO has found that FPS's has only limited influence over the allocation of resources because resource allocation decisions are the responsibility of GSA and tenant agencies.

I think it is fair to say that the current state of FPS is bleak.

However, the Department has put forward a transition plan to move FPS and implement changes throughout the agency. We cannot assume that relocation alone will resolve FPS' problems.

The multi-dimensional and complex challenges faced by this agency have been in the making for years. The solution to these problems will require resources, planning and commitment.

This plan is the first step. But it cannot be the only step taken.”

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