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Statement of Rep. Christopher Shays September 15, 2003

Let me first thank the City of Stamford and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security for allowing the Subcommittee to embed this hearing in the emergency response tabletop exercise now underway. We are here because - whether directed at Washington, D.C. or Washington, Connecticut - all terrorism is local. As a nation, our preparedness to meet the terrorist menace can only be measured in the strength and readiness of local responders.

How prepared are we to meet the uncertain, changing threat of terrorism, specifically the dangers posed by chemical, biological, radiological or even nuclear weapons? Exercises like today's will help answer that question. But this we already know: Unless efforts to train and equip first responders are sharply focused and aggressively funded, those sworn to protect public health and safety will be asked to confront mortal perils without all the tools they need to survive and prevail.

Well before September 11th 2001, this Subcommittee focused on the needs of first responders for real-time threat information, the need for an overarching strategy to guide their efforts, and the need to reorganize government at all levels to implement that strategy effectively and efficiently. In numerous sessions from Connecticut to Florida, we heard testimony from police officers, firefighters, HAZMAT teams, emergency

medical personnel and other experts expressing frustration over the extent and pace of federal counterterrorism equipment and training programs. They told us fragmentation and duplication hobbled a multi-jurisdictional, multi-agency, multi-billion dollar preparedness effort.

Since the September 11 attacks, much has been done, and a great deal of money has been spent, to consolidate and focus federal support for first responders. But last week we heard sobering evidence that local emergency personnel remain, “dangerously ill-prepared to handle a catastrophic attack on American soil.”

The recent report of the Independent Task Force of the Council of Foreign Relations (CFR) found that “federal agencies have been slow getting funding to state and local jurisdictions, and states have hampered the efficient dissemination of much-needed federal funds to the local level.” According to the report, “The overall effectiveness of federal funding has been further diluted by the lack of a process to determine the most critical needs of the emergency responder community in order to achieve the greatest return on investments.”

The key reason cited by the CFR Task Force for the current preparedness deficit was the lack of concrete, threat-based equipment and training standards against which to measure state and local capabilities. Standards capture community consensus and collective wisdom on the minimum that must be achieved with scarce public resources. Development of preparedness standards would transform unfocused motion into real progress toward actual preparedness. Standards should also guide allocation of scarce resources.

The question of whether first responder funding goes through the state or directly to localities is not an all-or-nothing proposition, especially in a state like Connecticut where the absence of counties can leave mid-sized cities like Stamford at a disadvantage in national funding formulae directed only to large metropolitan areas. Funding, even when through the state, must be timely and commensurate with need as calibrated by objective preparedness standards.

This week, the Subcommittee will launch a bi-partisan call for the development of national preparedness standards. We will call on DHS and the relevant congressional committees to consolidate and coordinate ongoing

standards programs to produce measurable norms for equipment and training readiness to meet the terrorist threat. What we see and hear today will be of inestimable value in that effort.

Again, we thank Mayor Malloy and his administration for their extraordinary hospitality and help in giving the Subcommittee this opportunity to examine local preparedness initiatives first-hand. We look forward to his testimony, and that of all our witnesses today, as we strive to improve the immediacy, impact and efficiency of federal first responder programs.