



Statement of

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before the

Subcommittee on Counterterrorism, Law Enforcement, and Intelligence
Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security Subcommittee
Committee on Homeland Security
United States House of Representatives

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Chairman Pfluger, Chairman Giménez, Ranking Member Magaziner, Ranking Member Thanedar, and Members of the Subcommittees, thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the National Football League's efforts—in conjunction with several other sports organizations including NASCAR, Major League Baseball, and the NCAA—to address the significant and growing threats posed by unlawful drone activity in and around our games and other major events. Unlawful drone activity risks the safety and security of the tens of millions of fans and stadium-goers who attend major sporting events each year across the country.

I joined the National Football League in September 2016 after more than 26 years in local law enforcement in the District of Columbia. At the NFL, for the past eight years, I have overseen the security policies and personnel that protect the 1,700 professional players, the hundreds of coaches and other staff associated with our 32 clubs, and the 17 million fans who attend our games each year. Club security officials and I work closely with local law enforcement officials, federal authorities, stadium owners, and many others to provide a safe and secure environment for our fans to enjoy the games. In addition, I have served on the Homeland Security Advisory Council, and participated in the Department of Homeland Security's Critical Infrastructure Partnership Advisory Council Working Groups. I also served on the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) UAS Detection and Mitigation Systems Aviation Rulemaking Committee.

I last had the privilege of testifying in September 2018, before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs when Congress was considering this same issue. Congress subsequently included the Preventing Emerging Threats Act in the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018. That law took an important first step in protecting the homeland against rogue drones by providing counterdrone authority to federal law enforcement officials at

the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security. Back then, and ever since, the NFL and other sports leagues have urged Congress to enact legislation that would take the appropriate next steps to meet this growing threat by providing counterdrone authority to state and local law enforcement officials, which are the entities that actually lead the work to provide safety and security at nearly all of our stadiums. They are at the frontline providing on-the-ground protection to fans, players, and stadium and event officials. To be clear: We are not seeking mitigation authority for the NFL or other sports organizations. We seek that authority for the law enforcement partners with whom we work in ensuring a safe and secure environment for our events.

Drone Incursions Are Growing

In the six years since my earlier testimony, we have witnessed a sharp increase in the number of threats, incidents, and incursions by unauthorized drones, especially over the last four years. In 2022, we experienced 2,537 rogue drone flights into the restricted air space above stadiums during NFL games, and in 2023, the number of incursions grew to 2,845. To put these numbers in context, when I testified in 2018, we had tracked about a dozen incursions by drones at stadiums during games in the 2017 season. In the 2018 season, we tracked 67 drone incursions at games. Even accounting for the increased sophistication of our drone tracking abilities today, these statistics almost certainly understate the total number of events. Yet, even with that limitation, these statistics demonstrate the dramatic increase in drone incursions—rising by ***more than 20,000 percent between 2017 and 2023***.

These incursions at NFL games included the following:

- In 2019, during the Super Bowl in Atlanta, an FBI team detected a drone in the restricted airspace moments before six Air Force F-16s prepared to conduct a flyover before the game. Fortunately, the FBI team was able to communicate with the flyover team to prevent a collision.
- A Ravens vs. Bengals game was delayed in November 2023 because of a drone flying over the stadium bowl. After stadium authorities detected the drone, state law enforcement officials were notified and located the drone operator, who was interviewed by officials, including local FBI agents.
- In January 2024, the AFC championship game between the Ravens and the Chiefs was paused because a drone violated the restricted airspace. Stadium authorities notified state law enforcement officials, who located the drone operator. The drone operator was questioned by state and federal law enforcement and charged with three felony counts related to operating an unregistered drone, serving as an airman without a certificate, and violating national defense airspace. The operator subsequently pled guilty to a misdemeanor.

Each and every one of these incursions violated longstanding law. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the FAA established flight restrictions over stadiums and other large gatherings. Congress subsequently strengthened and codified these requirements. The current version of the temporary flight restriction prohibits all aircraft operations over certain

sporting events from one hour before until one hour after the event, from ground level to 3,000 feet, and within a radius of three nautical miles. In addition to NFL games, this flight restriction applies to Major League Baseball games, NCAA Division I football games, and NASCAR, Indy Car, and Champ Series races. The flight restrictions designate the airspace as National Defense Airspace, and any operator who knowingly or willfully violates the flight restriction may be subject to criminal penalties.

This stadium and sporting event flight restriction is well-established and geographically and temporally limited. The FAA has a thorough and robust process for considering and approving waivers, which has effectively served the sports organizations, broadcast operators, and others for more than two decades. State and local law enforcement officials, however, still lack the authority to enforce the longstanding TFRs by taking action against rogue drones.

Our national security and intelligence agencies continue to warn that terrorist groups and other bad non-state actors consider stadiums and other mass gatherings attractive targets for attack. In fact, earlier this year, Islamic State propaganda specifically encouraged attacks on stadiums, including referencing the Paris Summer Olympics. And social media posts recently threatened drone attacks at the Cricket World Cup on Long Island, New York.

H.R. 8610, the Counter-UAS Authority Security, Safety, and Reauthorization Act

Given the persistent threat, the NFL and other sports leagues have been leading proponents of legislation—the Safeguarding the Homeland from Threats Posed by Unmanned Aircraft Systems Act (S. 1631 and H.R. 4333)—that builds on the 2018 law and provides more robust and effective protections for the Homeland in general, and major sporting events in particular. That bipartisan bill, which was first introduced in the previous Congress and reintroduced in this one, expands counterdrone authority to state and local law enforcement agencies through a six-year pilot program, subject to federal oversight.

In addition, we have appreciated the opportunity to work with senior leadership and staff of this committee, as well as the Transportation and Infrastructure and Judiciary Committees, to revise and improve H.R. 8610, the Counter-UAS Authority Security, Safety, and Reauthorization Act. We recognize the significance of the work, diligence, and cooperation of the committees to come together to introduce and markup this bill in September.

The current version of H.R. 8610 is a step in the right direction. It would ensure that existing authorities for the Department of Justice and Department of Homeland Security do not expire, and it starts the process of empowering local law enforcement to keep fans safe. Nonetheless, we encourage the Committee to make additional improvements to the legislation that gives sports leagues and our law enforcement partners the additional tools we need to better protect our fans.

We appreciate that the bill provides for a pilot program for state and local law enforcement counterdrone capabilities, and that the proposal explicitly includes stadiums in the definition of covered sites. As amended, the bill limits the pilot program to only five agencies, potentially expanding to fifteen, and further limits the program to just four covered sites per agency. First, we strongly recommend expanding the pilot program to adequately protect fans

attending major sporting events. Specifically, we encourage the Committee to increase the number of agencies and remove the cap on the number of sites that each agency could protect. These changes would better help us protect more fans in more places in a more expeditious timeframe across the country.

Second, the regulatory process imposed by the bill is unnecessarily complicated and cumbersome, which will result in bureaucratic barriers that delay the deployment of counterdrone capabilities. Federal law already provides a proven framework for implementing counterdrone authority, approving technology, and selecting sites for protection, as outlined in the Preventing Emerging Threats Act and implemented by federal agencies. The NFL supports maintaining this established framework, as proposed by S. 1631/H.R. 4333. In our view, there is no need to fix what already is working.

Third, we recommend that the provisions in the bill related to advanced drone detection technology, which is used to detect, track, and identify drones, be expanded to authorize deployment by critical infrastructure owners and operators, including trained stadium security personnel. Our stadium security personnel already have access to passive drone detection technology, and they should have direct access to and use of advanced drone detection technology, without needing to engage an intermediary. Detection technology has been used safely for years, and it does not present the more complicated legal issues associated with drone-mitigation authorities. Detection is not the same as disabling or “bringing down” a drone. That is a law enforcement function. By allowing private parties to use more sophisticated detection technology, we can better assist law enforcement partners.

Congress Should Prioritize Enacting Counterdrone Authority for the Stadium TFR

Finally, we encourage the Committee to consider prioritizing TFR-protected sporting events as a foundation for enacting any counterdrone legislation, and to do so as soon as possible. Given the growing threat of drones at stadiums and sporting events, and the longstanding and well-established flight restrictions over games and events, Congress should act now to extend counterdrone authority to state and local law enforcement agencies for the narrow, mission-specific, and time-limited purpose of protecting the sports stadium-TFRs when they are in effect.

We recognize that certain stakeholders have raised privacy and civil liberty concerns around counterdrone expansion—particularly when exercising counterdrone missions in certain circumstances or areas. Under current law, however, drones and other aircraft are simply not permitted in areas protected during a TFR. A drone operator flying a drone over a crowded stadium is already breaking the law. Therefore, we believe any privacy or civil liberty concerns are diminished significantly in the context of using proven counterdrone technology to enforce longstanding TFRs around sporting events.

Furthermore, Congress, the FAA, and national security agencies have made considerable strides in implementing a comprehensive regulatory structure for drone operations that lay the groundwork for immediately expanding counterdrone authority to state and local law enforcement to protect stadiums during live events. These steps included implementing Remote ID, adopting a comprehensive program for remote pilot certification, creating registration and

labeling requirements for drones, and implementing Congress's modification of the hobbyist exemption, all of which the sports leagues supported.

Due to the federal counterdrone authorities under current law, stadium operators and law enforcement now have a proven track record of safe, successful, and secure use of counterdrone capabilities at many NFL stadiums. As of today, federal law enforcement authorities have safely and effectively provided counterdrone protections at six NFL stadiums that have hosted a Super Bowl. Technology, airspace safety, and telecommunications questions have all been addressed at these stadiums, and we have a proven record of deploying counterdrone capabilities safely and effectively at these stadiums. The same technologies that have already been cleared for use in the National Airspace and safely deployed at these same stadiums should be permitted for use by state or local law enforcement to keep fans safe at games throughout the season.

The time to act to keep fans safe is now. Even in the waning days of the 118th Congress, we urge you to take any possible steps that will start to protect more of our fans from the threats of illicit drone use. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today, and I would be happy to address your questions.