

**Office of the Sergeant at Arms
U.S. House of Representatives**

**Statement of Acting Sergeant at Arms Timothy P. Blodgett
Before
The Committee on Appropriations
January 26, 2021**

Chair DeLauro, Ranking Member Granger, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about the events of January 6, 2021—one of the darkest days in the history of our democracy.

I want to briefly touch on the relationship between the House Sergeant at Arms and the Capitol Police. The House Sergeant at Arms coordinates requests and security planning for the House of Representatives with the United States Capitol Police. Additionally, the House Sergeant at Arms serves on the Capitol Police Board – essentially a Board of Directors for the Capitol Police.

I will briefly discuss what went poorly and what went well. It is clear there was a failure of preparation. Whether it was insufficient or conflicting intelligence, lacking ability to translate that intelligence into action, insufficient preparation or an inadequate ability to mobilize partner agencies for immediate assistance, a series of events, once thought unfathomable, unfolded allowing our most sacred halls to be breached. And, sadly, several lives were lost, including Officer Brian Sicknick and Officer Howard Liebengood. As time unfolds, we are beginning to have a better understanding of this series of events. We must examine the event and we must learn from these lessons to ensure that our systems and structures do not fail us again. One of the initial examinations must be in how communications work on the Hill and how we must adapt and evolve our structures, mindset, and our procedures. We must harden this campus. Too many access points were breached on January 6 and the Speaker has tasked Lt. General Russel Honore to review Capitol Security to help us turn these lessons into action.

Communications to the Hill community also need to improve. Our current communications structure is too rigid to appropriately adapt to the multiple varying crises that unfolded that day—multiple bombs, a breach of the Capitol, and a riot. The different crises strained the ability to communicate fast, accurate, and pertinent information. In addition, the sole reliance on pre-worded, generic messaging is not transparent. Originally designed to avoid disseminating incorrect information while in the midst of an event, the communications did not convey much needed information in a dynamic crisis. We also need to rethink the frequency of communication. In the past, we have been criticized for sending too many messages. This may be a fair point when dealing with day-to-day incidents, but not in an extraordinary situation.

Another system we need to implement is an accountability system. Numerous staff were barricaded in offices during the insurrection. When these staff notified SAA staff that they were trapped, either USCP or SAA staff or both together would go out and retrieve the individual. We need to implement a system where we can be notified in real time so we can assist in the retrieval

of Members and staff in a crisis. Hopefully we will never have to use the system, but it is better to be prepared. We rarely encounter the crisis we expect, but our system of communications needs to adapt to constantly changing and unexpected circumstances.

I also want to discuss what went well. First, the bottom line is that every Member and House staff went home without death or serious injury. That is always the number one priority of the Office of the House Sergeant at Arms. Congress consists, at its core, of people. The House of Representatives has met in different places, and different chambers, but it is always the people's representatives and their staff who are irreplaceable.

Our evacuation procedures worked well. With the assistance of many brave USCP officers, Sergeant at Arms staff and Members, we were able to evacuate the Chamber and get Members and staff to a secure location. We were able to utilize the escape hoods to enable the Capitol Police to deploy tear gas, when and if necessary, to clear an evacuation route from the Chamber. We were ultimately able to prepare for Congress to discharge its Constitutional responsibilities that same night.

Additionally, the employees of the House Sergeant at Arms have shown tremendous dedication. Amidst a pandemic, they have worked countless hours—essentially abandoned their loved ones—to work in what became a war zone. They have arranged for airport security, monitored threats, conducted emergency training, prepared for a Presidential Inauguration and are taking every effort to ensure that Members of Congress are safe at the U.S. Capitol, in their district, and while traveling.

Please know that I come here today to tell you that I and the entire Sergeant at Arms team are dedicated to fixing what went wrong and ensuring that the House and its Members and staff can continue to safely fulfill their constitutional duties.

However, I also need your help. Please take time from your calendar to ensure both you and your staff are prepared for emergencies. We are able to provide training on a variety of different security and emergency procedures. If you call our office, we will be happy to arrange that training. Please also support forthcoming efforts to develop a stronger security posture on the Hill; it will require assistance from Members to make the necessary changes to our culture to do so.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this briefing.