

**Statement of Julia A. Pierson
Director, United States Secret Service
Department of Homeland Security**

**Before the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
United States House of Representatives**

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Introduction

Good morning, Chairman Issa, Ranking Member Cummings and distinguished members of the Committee. I am here today to address the concern that we all share, following the incident on September 19th at the White House. It is clear that our security plan was not executed properly.

I take full responsibility; what happened is unacceptable and it will never happen again. As Director, my primary concern is the operational readiness of my workforce and, over the past 18 months, I have worked hard to proactively address all aspects of Presidential protection and the security of the White House Complex. I have also been aggressive in addressing human capital challenges, professionalism, and leadership development with the goal of ensuring operational readiness.

As I have informed you and your staff, given that much of what we do to protect the President and the White House involves information that is highly sensitive or classified, I will be limited in what I can say in a public hearing. However, I will share as much information as I responsibly can during the open portion of today's hearing. I am willing to give more complete responses in a closed session after this session is complete.

September 19th Incident

On September 19th, a man scaled the north fence of the White House, crossed the lawn while ignoring verbal commands from armed Uniformed Division officers, entered through the front door, and was arrested on the state floor. Immediately that night, I ordered security enhancements around the Complex. Additionally, Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson has directed, in clear and very strong terms, that he receive a thorough, beginning-to-end accounting of what transpired on Friday, September 19th. Specifically, he has directed that a full investigation be conducted of the event and that he receive a report of investigation. As a result, I initiated a comprehensive review of the incident and protective measures to ensure this will not happen again.

The review began with a physical assessment of the site and personnel interviews. All decisions made that evening are being evaluated, including decisions on tactics and use of force, in light of the totality of the circumstances confronting those officers.

I am committed to the following:

1. A complete and thorough investigation of the facts of this incident, to include necessary personnel actions;
2. A complete and thorough review of all policies, procedures and protocols in place that govern the security of the White House Complex and our response to this incident; and
3. A coordinated, informed effort to make any and all adjustments necessary to properly ensure the safety and security of the President and First Family and those who work and visit the White House.

White House emergency action plans are multi-faceted and tailored to each threat. The Secret Service has apprehended 16 individuals who have jumped the fence over the last five years, including six this year alone. In fact, on September 11, 2014, a week prior to the events that are the subject of today's hearing, officers apprehended an individual seconds after he scaled the fence and ran onto the grounds.

In addition to fence-jumpers, over the last five years, hundreds of individuals have approached the White House fence verbalizing threats toward our protectees, or acting in a suspicious manner. Our officers and agents routinely leverage their training and experience to make decisions to arrest or transfer these individuals to appropriate facilities for mental health evaluations.

Protecting the People's House

Protecting the White House Complex is a challenge in any threat environment. In addition to being a national icon, the complex consists of public spaces, executive offices where our nation's highest leaders congregate, and the private residence of the President and First Family. Ensuring the safety and well-being of all who work and live at the White House, while preserving accessibility to millions of visitors per year, requires a unique balance.

Since becoming Director, and in the years before that, the security of the President and White House has been my top priority. With the help of Congress, the Secret Service has been undertaking significant enhancements of protective countermeasures and security features at the White House. We are constantly adjusting the security measures for the President and First Family, and the White House. There is no such thing as "business as usual" in our line of work; we have to be successful 100 percent of the time, and we are constantly making changes and doing everything possible to ensure that we are.

In the past five years, the Secret Service has upgraded perimeter cameras, officer booths, vehicle access gates, and command and control systems, along with enhancements to highly classified programs that have made the President and Complex more secure. We thank Congress for their support in a time of constrained resources. We have generated many of these enhancements in direct response to intelligence information on known and emerging terrorist tactics.

Beyond technology, approximately 75% of our annual budget is dedicated to payroll costs, which supports our most valuable asset – our people. The agency relies heavily on the training, experience, and judgment of our men and women to make critical, split-second decisions.

Conclusion

With respect to the many questions that have been raised and opinions proffered in the wake of the September 19th incident, I do not want to get ahead of the investigation that is underway.

Let me also say that I recognize that these events did not occur in a vacuum. The Secret Service has had its share of challenges in recent years – some during my tenure and some before – of which this is the most recent. I intend over the coming months to redouble my efforts, not only in response to this incident, but in general to bring the Secret Service to a level of performance that lives up to the vital mission we perform, the important individuals we protect, and the American people we serve.

As Director, I am proud of all Secret Service employees who serve each day with honor and distinction, and put their lives on the line throughout the world. It is my responsibility to ensure that these men and women have the resources and training they need for mission success. From my first days as Director, I have worked with DHS Headquarters and Secretary Johnson, the Administration, and Congress, including members of this Committee, to develop a comprehensive, forward leaning strategy to further enhance the Secret Service's capabilities. We remain dedicated and committed to protecting the President and First Family and the sanctity of the White House Complex within the bounds of the Constitution and laws of the United States.

I'd like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.