Congressional Testimony: Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, Information Technology, and Government Innovation of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform hearing titled, "Leveraging Technology to Strengthen Immigration Enforcement."

Good morning, Chairwoman Mace, Ranking Member Brown, and Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee and of the full Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

My name is John Fabbricatore, and I am here today to discuss the critical matter of leveraging technology to counter criminal cartels, secure our nation's borders, and enhance immigration enforcement. I am a United States Air Force veteran and a retired law enforcement officer with 30 years of federal law enforcement experience, including 23 years at both the legacy Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and in senior roles at U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). I have extensive experience with interior immigration enforcement operations and have witnessed firsthand the evolving challenges and the necessity of adopting innovative, technology-driven solutions.

Technology has been a game-changer in the realm of biometrics, allowing us to collect and analyze unique physical characteristics for identification purposes. Facial recognition technology, in particular, has become increasingly sophisticated and effective in identifying individuals who may pose a threat to national security or public safety. This type of technology has proven invaluable in disrupting human trafficking networks and preventing fraudulent entry into the country.

ICE- Enforcement Removal Operations leverages a wide variety of data sets to target illegal aliens in the United States. One of the ways I saw immediate success in targeting was through Secure Communities, a federal information-sharing partnership between DHS and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) that helped to identify in-custody aliens without imposing new or additional requirements on state and local law enforcement. Secure Communities was thriving, and due to that success, it was terminated by the Obama administration, reinstated successfully during President Trump's first term, and then revoked and ended again under President Biden. I witnessed Sanctuary policies rise up around the country to hamper Secure Communities, and many illegal aliens were simply released back into our communities, where Deportation Officers were then forced to go into the community to locate and arrest them. While Secure Communities worked when it was in place, we need updated tools rooted in similar principles that use modern technology to process data more rapidly and at scale. We need to evolve with the times and leverage all existing technology in the private sector to enhance targeting and create high-volume targeting packages through automation software. Our officers need to be on the

streets arresting criminal aliens and not at their desks manually searching through dozens of unconnected databases in an effort to create casework.

Now is the time to embrace new technology and unconventional methods to improve targeting. We need new, innovative data platforms that can help us identify these individuals and where to apprehend them. Emerging companies use advanced machine learning, cloud-native platforms, and massive data repositories to reveal unseen relationships and deliver actionable intelligence. Data is the key to targeting.

Currently, we have tools like the EAGLE Direct Identification Environment (EDDIE), which allows agents in the field to fingerprint detainees and connect to extensive federal databases from a simple device connected to a smartphone.

During my time on a drug task force in downtown Denver, we used EDDIE to identify heroin traffickers falsely claiming U.S. citizenship. The device, connected via smartphone, allowed us to verify their identities instantly and remove these threats quickly, preventing further harm to the community.

High-risk situations call for innovative tools that minimize potential dangers for officers. Technologies like drones, anti-drone systems, and robotics are increasingly valuable. For instance, ICE Special Response Teams have used these tools to assess dangerous areas remotely, significantly reducing risks for agents and the surrounding community.

Moreover, advancements in communications technology have greatly improved interagency coordination and communication among law enforcement agencies at all levels. Encrypted radios and secure messaging systems enable real-time sharing of critical information and facilitate collaborative efforts to combat cross-border criminal activity. However, communication is still a problem in places like Colorado, where the Rocky Mountains limit robust and complete connectivity. ICE officers are often forced to rely on alternative communications like cell phones, but the same coverage issues and dead spots are common. Improving the radio repeaters or looking at satellite technology will help federal agencies, and can be expanded to help first responders in small rural communities. Many areas along our Northern and Southern border deal with the same limitations and communications voids.

The country has been siloed in its law enforcement approach since 9/11, an example during my career where the United States leveraged and used a "whole of government approach" to target a common threat. Since then, the government has returned to its same approach, and little is being accomplished – the last four years saw a border that was unsecured, allowing drugs like heroin, methamphetamines, and fentanyl to run rampant across our border. Along with this, human trafficking has not skipped a beat. Over the past

several years, the country has become familiar with transnational criminal organizations such as Tren De Aragua and South American Theft Groups (SATGs). These criminals have been thriving in the United States because our targeting efforts are not where they need to be as a country. For targeting to be truly effective, it requires a "whole of government approach." President Trump has issued several executive orders in which he has deputized federal law enforcement agencies to support implementation of the mass deportation initiative; our local and state law enforcement partners and our National Guard are being deputized to assist in the enforcement of immigration law. This is the first step forward to truly address targeting, but more innovative efforts are needed to truly secure our country from all threats.

Given the current limitations, including the insufficient detention space to accommodate thousands of removable individuals, leveraging Alternatives to Detention (ATD) becomes indispensable. Programs such as the Intensive Supervision Appearance Program (ISAP), which utilize case management and global positioning systems (GPS) to ensure compliance with release conditions, are crucial in addressing these challenges. For ATD to fulfill its role in managing large-scale removals, it is imperative that we continue to expand the technology as we adhere strictly to the program's directives and guidelines for implementation.

Having served and retired as an ICE Field Office Director, I can attest to the effectiveness of the ATD program and ISAP. Unfortunately, the program was not implemented efficiently or correctly under the Biden administration. Their inability to successfully implement the ATD program does not inherently indicate that the program itself is ineffective. Considering the goal of large-scale deportations and the capability to detain a substantial number of individuals eligible for removal, it's crucial for the ATD program to operate successfully and be implemented proficiently.

The threats impacting our borders today are not static; they are evolving and dynamic, demanding innovative, technology-driven solutions. By adopting creative strategies and leveraging emerging technologies, policymakers have the opportunity to build an efficient, responsive, and forward-looking border and immigration enforcement framework.

Congress must recognize the critical role technology and specialized expertise play in securing the Southern border, coastal waters, and interior hubs. Investing in advanced tools and operational modernization will yield measurable outcomes, including stronger national security, the eradication of fentanyl entering our nation, and a significant reduction in human and sex trafficking and illegal immigration as a whole.

Recommendations for Strategic Integration of Technology

To address the complex and evolving threats at our borders, I respectfully recommend the following actions:

1. **Increase Budget Allocations for Technology**

Ensure adequate funding for Enforcement and Removal Operations and other DHS components for the research, development, and implementation of cutting-edge technologies deployed across borders, coastal waters, and transportation hubs. Prioritized investments will enable law enforcement to operate more efficiently and effectively.

2. **Streamline Data Sharing Across Agencies**

Enhance interagency collaboration by modernizing systems to facilitate real-time data sharing. This will increase the accuracy and efficiency of identifying threats and strengthen communication among federal, state, and local enforcement agencies.

3. **Establish a Task Force for Emerging Technologies**

Create a task force to evaluate, test, and integrate emerging technologies. This will ensure new solutions are suited to the operational realities of law enforcement and can be seamlessly adopted into workflows.

4. **Continue to Partner with Private Contractors for Positions Where a Law Enforcement Officer is Not Necessarily Required**

Leverage private-sector innovations to augment logistics, aviation and surveillance capabilities. Create partnerships that will allow cost-effective scaling and access to the latest technologies in targeting and alternatives to detention without compromising operational integrity.

5. **Modernize Communication Infrastructure**

Prioritize investments in updated communication tools to support ground, maritime and air operations. These systems play a central role in coordinating responses and mitigating risks in the interior and on our borders and waters.

6. **Ongoing Updated Training for Personnel**

Ensure personnel receive continual training to effectively utilize new technologies. This will maximize operational efficiency and enhance response capabilities in diverse and unpredictable scenarios.

Closing Remarks

By investing in cutting-edge technologies and modernizing operations, we can achieve tangible results to enhance national security, stop the flow of fentanyl into our country, and drastically reduce human and sex trafficking. Adopting innovative strategies and utilizing emerging technologies will allow a more effective, adaptable, and future-focused border and immigration enforcement system.

Thank you again for the honor of addressing this subcommittee. I trust the insights provided today underscore the necessity and potential of integrating advanced technology into border security and immigration enforcement operations. I look forward to answering your questions and working together to ensure the safety and security of our nation.