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STATEMENT OF U.S. REPRESENTATIVE SCHAKOWSKY ON THE BENEFITS OF AUDIO-VISUAL TECHNOLOGY IN ADDRESSING RACIAL PROFILING

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The House Government Reform Committee today held a hearing on the benefits of audio-visual technology to combat racial profiling. U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), a member of the Committee, delivered the following statement.

"Mr. Chairman, thank you for calling this important hearing to discuss the usage of audio-visual technology as a law enforcement tool to battle the devastating and growing problem of racial profiling in our nation. Even today, skin color can make one a suspect for criminal activity in this country. Tens of thousands of innocent motorists and travelers on highways and in airports across the country are victims of racial profiling. These discriminatory stops have reached epidemic proportions in recent years, fueled by the 'War on Drugs,' that targets people who fit a 'drug courier' or 'gang member' profile. This targeting has so dramatically affected African Americans, Latinos, and other minorities, that the minority community has given it the derisive term of DWB or even DWM, "driving while black or brown" or "driving while Mexican."

"It is a tragedy that our nation has not evolved beyond the legacy of police abuse against people based on their color. Many law-abiding African Americans and Latinos alter their driving habits to 'evade' law enforcement. Some completely avoid places like all-white suburbs, where they fear police harassment for looking 'out of place.' Racial profiling affects the decision of which car to buy or what to wear for many people of color. That is unnecessary and unfair.

"Perhaps the personal cost exacted by racially biased traffic stops is clearest in the instructions given by minority parents to their children on how to behave if they are stopped by the police. This advice transcends economic background and geographic region. Karen, a social worker, says that when her young son begins to drive, she will tell him: 'The police are supposed to be there to protect and to serve, but you being black and being male, you've got two strikes against you. Keep your hands on the steering wheel, and do not run, because they will shoot you in the back. Let them do whatever they want to do. I know it's humiliating, but let them do whatever they want to do to make sure you get out of that situation alive. Deal with your emotions later. Your emotions are going to come second-or last.' This is not an uncommon or irrational fear for minority parents. Minority parents know that traffic stops can lead to physical, even deadly confrontations. We must put an end to the practice of racial profiling that undermines the legitimacy and effectiveness of the criminal justice system."

"I am deeply concerned about this problem and I am eager to explore new technology that can provide concrete statistics to racial profiling and clear up inconsistencies in stories that might exist."