

Senate Committee on the Judiciary

Hearing on “The Future of Drones in America: Law Enforcement and Privacy Considerations”

Questions for the Record

From Ranking Member Charles E. Grassley

Questions for Benjamin Miller

(1) Urban versus Rural Environments

Drone technology can provide valuable assistance to police officers in remote areas where it is hard to reach and inaccessible because of proximity or terrain.

- What type of assistance would drone technology offer police officers in cities or a more urban environment? Unmanned aircraft systems offer much of the same valuable assistance to police officers in urban areas as they do in remote areas. Given the advantages of flight, variables on the ground have minor influence on the outcomes of this equation. In both environments, UAS provide for the opportunity to see from a different vantage point, a ‘higher ground’ perspective if you will. Whether the device is being used for a search and rescue mission in eastern Montana or a traffic accident investigation in downtown Los Angeles, the assistance is provided from an elevated position.
- Are drones currently being used by law enforcement in urban areas? If yes, what types of drones and drone technology are used in urban areas? Including the Mesa County Sheriff’s Office, we are aware of four law enforcement agency operational Certificates of Authorization for the use of UAS. They are U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Grand Forks County (ND) Sheriff’s Office, and Arlington (TX) Police Department. The Airborne Law Enforcement Association (ALEA) does not collect data that would answer whether or not these devices are being utilized in urban areas. As such, we would suggest contacting the Federal Aviation Administration and/or the agencies directly.
- Aside from the use of drones in protecting the Nation’s borders, are you aware of any Federal law enforcement agency utilizing drone technology for surveillance or other activity? ALEA does not collect data that would answer this question. We would suggest contacting the Federal Aviation Administration and/or the agencies directly.