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For Immediate Release

Contact: Tracy Rosenberg, T: (510) 684-6853 E: tracy@media-alliance.org

Urban Shield SWAT Drill and Weapons Expo Suspended for 2019
Homeland Security Funds Divided Among Bay Area Regions

Dublin-At the March 14 Bay Area UASI meeting, the Homeland Security local approval authority voted to cancel the 2019 regional Urban Shield exercise, all except the "Yellow Command", which focuses on mass evacuation and transit infrastructure, after declining to accept Alameda County's offer to host and coordinate a transformed event.

After years of complaints regarding the militarized and xenophobic tenor of the country's biggest weapons expo and regional SWAT drill, Alameda's 5-member board of supervisors convened the second of two committees set up in the past three years to figure out how to transition the event from a militarized war games display into a whole-community based exercise. The 2018-2019 committee did just that, coming up with a 63-recommendation package which largely won the support of the majority of the board. (60 of the 63 recommendations made the final cut).

Board chair Richard Valle attended the meeting, and although only able to speak briefly in the public comment section, asked Homeland Security to forgive him for his compassion. He shared a handful of the recommendations he had voted for, which focused on cultural competence, realistic threat prioritization, and protecting communities that are most vulnerable in disaster, like the elderly, the disabled, and people with limited English proficiency and said he had been driven to vote for them.

[Listen to Alameda County Board of Supervisors Chair Richard Valle speak at the Bay Area DHS Approval Authority meeting in Dublin on March 14.](#)

Valle's plea met with some appreciation from the Bay Area UASI board who agreed work had to be done before issuing a new training RFP with more community collaboration. But the March 14 consensus was that this was a project for a future year. As at several discussions in the past few weeks, vague claims were made about some of the committee changes being contrary to grant guidelines, but despite several direct questions, there were no specific examples provided. The Alameda County's Sheriff Department simply said that in their opinion the recommendations "usurped Homeland Security's authority".

Speaking as an individual and not on behalf of the County, Alameda Sheriff's Department public information officer Ray Kelly admitted the Sheriff's Department had "made mistakes", but called the wide-ranging community complaints about the event "political theater". Among some of the mistakes that had upset community stakeholders in the past five years were the sale of belligerent t-shirts at the weapons expo threatening the Black Lives Matter and peace movements, the detonation of dozens of faux explosives in a wildlife refuge at Alameda Point, the presence of the armed right-wing vigilante group Oath Keepers at a community disaster fair aimed at families, the use of Palestinian headgear on actors posing as combatants which was dismissed as sun protection, the use of vendors who sell racist target dummies by skin tone on their website, fusion center surveillance of peaceful protesters picketing the event's facility, and the secretive training of ICE officers at the event.

Oakland Privacy co-coordinator and Media Alliance Ed Tracy Rosenberg, who attended the UASI meeting with several other members of the Stop Urban Shield Coalition, commented: "Alameda County deserves the Bay Area's thanks for pushing the pause button on overly militarized police training. The repeated problems with Urban Shield were not just "insensitivities", as they had have been characterized. They were a feature of the knotting together of needed disaster preparedness with the worst excesses of warlike exercises, trigger-happy law enforcement and xenophobic distrust of people of color. It is time to do better and the Bay Area will do so."

After the decision was made to cancel the event for 2019, the approval authority re-allocated funding, leaving \$800K with Alameda County, giving an extra \$100K to San Francisco, Oakland and San Jose, funding some new equipment grants, and dividing the balance geographically between the North, East, West and South Bay regions

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