



World Cup host cities warn Congress over security concerns



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Local officials representing World Cup host cities warned Congress on Tuesday that security concerns, coordination problems and inadequate federal funding are risking catastrophe with little

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Anthony Olivieri



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Associated Press



Sources: Mexico game still on amid cartel violence

Lizzy Becherano

Officials testified before the committee that local agencies have failed to coordinate adequately with each other and the federal government as they work out complex security details on transportation, hotels, fan events and practice locations, as well as the stadiums themselves.

Drone threats, human trafficking, the presence of ICE agents at games and the recent cartel violence in Mexico are adding to the troubled picture provided not only by the witnesses but also by committee members themselves.

They registered their concerns on the 11th day of a freeze on Homeland Security Department funding following deadly shootings of U.S. citizens by ICE officers in Minneapolis. The department also dispenses the Federal Emergency Management Agency funds required

for World Cup security.

The federal government had previously earmarked \$625 million for the 11 U.S. host cities "to enhance security and preparedness" and \$250 million "to strengthen their ability to detect, identify, track, or mitigate" drone threats, FEMA states on its website. Security planning is heavily impacted by the government's inability to dispense the funds.

The FIFA World Cup kicks off on June 11 in Mexico City, with Los Angeles hosting the opening U.S. game on June 12 and New York and New Jersey hosting the final on July 19. Recent drug cartel violence near host city Guadalajara has heightened concerns about Mexico's ability to secure its venues.

"I feel that if we'd been having this conversation

two years ago, we'd be in better shape," Mike Sena, president of the National Fusion Center Association, testified. "... But today, as we're approaching these games, we're nowhere near the capability we need."

Events such as the World Cup and the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles will test homeland security more than it has been in decades, Sena said, adding that a lack of coordination between local agencies has added to the security headaches.



World Cup host city officials testify at a House Homeland Security Committee meeting on Tuesday. Getty Images

"For events of this scale, that approach means serious risks may go unaddressed," Sena said.

Ray Martinez, the chief operating officer for the Miami World Cup host committee, said that without the roughly \$70 million in federal funds that Miami has applied for, the end of March would mark a "drop dead date" to start canceling plans due to inadequate security, starting with the Fan Fest concert events planned around the games.

"We're 107 days out from the tournament but, more importantly, we're about 70-something days out from starting to build the Fan Fest. These decisions have to be made," Martinez said.
"...Without receiving this money, it could be

catastrophic for our planning and coordination."

Rep. Carlos Gimenez (R-Florida) said that FEMA staffers who process grants are not working during the partial shutdown and that the funding is "not coming till the government reopens."

Republicans chided their Democratic colleagues on the committee for withholding the votes required to unfreeze the funds.

Joseph Mabin, the deputy chief for Kansas City police, said release of the funding is "critical" for his city to hire additional personnel ahead of the World Cup, and that his local department did not have enough staff to cover all security threats. Kansas City will host six games and serve as base camp for four teams.

Salaries for many of those working on the planning and coordination are also "contingent" on the frozen funds, said Travis Nelson, deputy chief of staff and homeland security adviser to the Maryland governor.

Nelson described this moment as "pivotal," and compared it to a Jenga game where one wrong move "is going to cause the whole thing to come down."

Recently, town officials in Foxborough, Massachusetts, sought clarity on the source of around \$8 million they say is needed to fund public safety for this summer's World Cup games at Gillette Stadium, the home of the New England Patriots.

The White House World Cup Task Force headed by Andrew Giuliani did not immediately respond to ESPN's request for comment.