



FESIA A. DAVENPORT
Chief Executive Officer

County of Los Angeles **CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICE** Office of Emergency Management

County Emergency Operations Center
1275 N. Eastern Avenue, Los Angeles, California 90063
(323) 980-2260 • Fax (323) 881-6897
<https://www.lacounty.gov/emergency>



KEVIN MCGOWAN
Director

Testimony of Kevin McGowan

Director, County of Los Angeles, Office of Emergency Management

Before the House Committee on Appropriations

Subcommittee on Homeland Security

March 16, 2021

Good morning Chairwoman Roybal-Allard, Ranking Member Fleishmann and honorable members of the Committee. My name is Kevin McGowan and I serve as the Director of Los Angeles County's Office of Emergency Management. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the County's response to COVID-19, our partnership with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and our future in continuing to build emergency management capabilities and capacity with the goal of making Los Angeles County safer, healthier and more resilient.

First, I would like to acknowledge the incredible toll that COVID-19 has taken across our country and throughout the world. In Los Angeles County alone, COVID-19 has caused more than 22,000 deaths and infected over 1.2 million people. I also want to extend my deepest thanks and appreciation to the hundreds of thousands of Los Angeles County health care workers, emergency responders, and disaster service workers for their commitment and steadfast resolve, day in and day out, in answering the call to service, for over a year. Nothing they have done has been easy. Every day they are committed to accomplishing the hard work that has been placed in front of them. They have saved countless lives, reduced suffering for millions and have kept our community whole in the face of disaster. They truly represent the fullest measure of public service.

Los Angeles County is the largest county in the nation (by population) with nearly 10 million residents who account for more than a quarter of California's population. Los

Kevin McGowan
March 16, 2021

Angeles County is comprised of 88 cities, including the second largest city in the nation, the City of Los Angeles, numerous unincorporated areas and more than 200 special districts. By virtue of its size and complexity, Los Angeles County faces numerous challenges during all types of disasters. In the 2020 National Risk Index, FEMA identified Los Angeles County as having the highest risk index of all counties in the nation with a risk index score of 100 out of 100. This underscores the critical importance for Los Angeles County to continue to build its emergency management capabilities to mitigate the risk of natural disasters, and, similarly, to address its response to other disasters, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

Los Angeles County's Office of Emergency Management is an all-hazards emergency management program that coordinates and supports preparedness, planning, response, recovery and mitigation functions. The Office of Emergency Management also maintains, manages and operates the County Emergency Operations Center and assembles and a Unified Coordination Group when responding to, recovering from and mitigating against emergencies and disasters. Both of which are essential in their contribution to achieving a countywide unified effort.

On March 4, 2020, Los Angeles County proclaimed a local emergency due to COVID-19. The County's Emergency Operations Center immediately activated and from day one our initial emergency management actions were to coordinate and support the County's public health efforts in mitigating the effects of the global pandemic. The subsequent activities resulted in the uninterrupted continuation of the County's essential services while also allowing for the distribution of tens of millions of critical pieces of personal protective equipment, the administration of over 1.5 million COVID-19 tests and 2.5 million doses of vaccine, the distribution of millions of meals and other essential goods to our communities, the safe sheltering of thousands of individuals to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and the local financial and programmatic management of hundred's of millions of dollars of FEMA's public assistance program.

Unity of effort with our Federal, State, and community partners has been our cornerstone during this response. In Los Angeles County it truly has been a whole of community response. The County's emergency management mission requires this, and it is ever present in our strong

Kevin McGowan
March 16, 2021

organizational partnerships, with the FEMA and the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) and my professional relationship with Mr. Fenton and Mr. Ghilarducci. No one governmental organization can do this job alone. With this whole of community partnership, we have leveraged our strengths, capabilities and resources to respond to COVID-19.

As our County's response activities expanded exponentially in size, scope and duration, the need for Federal and State technical assistance and resources became even more critical. Routinely, day and night, we've used well established lines of communication between the County, FEMA and the CalOES to collectively solve problems through joint efforts built on the foundation of effective interagency coordination and communication.

There have been numerous positive results from this partnership. The first, was FEMA's rapid approval of expedited projects, which provided a lifeline of critical financial resources to the County and supported our ability to continue providing critical services and response functions to our community. The second, was FEMA's support for non-congregate sheltering, which resulted in Project Roomkey, a collaborative effort with the State and the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority to secure hotel and motel rooms for vulnerable people experiencing homelessness in the County. Project Roomkey not only helps protect high-risk individuals, but also helps prevent the spread of the virus in our communities and protect the capacity of our hospitals and healthcare system. The third, FEMA's efforts to support the distribution of vaccines to residents from communities who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. FEMA's partnership with CalOES at the California State University of Los Angeles has resulted in the administration of hundreds of thousands of vaccination doses in some of the County's hardest hit communities.

Finally, I want to express the County's appreciation and support for President Biden's executive actions in January 2021 directing FEMA to provide 100 percent reimbursement of eligible costs for the public assistance program, retroactive to the start of the emergency as well as prospectively. This action greatly reduces the financial stress of the widespread pandemic-related costs, which have been borne by local jurisdictions such as the County of Los Angeles.

The pandemic is not over, and we understand that there is a long recovery ahead. We appreciate our partnership with FEMA and hope to continue to identify ways to improve the

Kevin McGowan
March 16, 2021

effectiveness and efficiency of COVID-19 response and recovery activities. In particular, I recommend exploring: 1) more integration of FEMA response capabilities and resources with state and local organizations, 2) streamlining the administration of the public assistance program, including minimizing administrative burdens on local jurisdictions and the development of consistent program guidance and 3) revising grant methodologies, requirements and performance periods for grant programs like the Emergency Management Performance Grant and the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Grant that consider the National Risk Index. Additionally, the County is hopeful that an additional upfront commitment of Federal financial resources can be obtained to continue the important initiatives already underway.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee today and I look forward to any questions you may have.