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DIRECTOR  
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**Before the U.S. House Homeland Security Committee  
Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications**

*Field Hearing: Assessing Central Indiana's Preparedness for a Mass Casualty Event*

Good morning Chairwoman Brooks, Senator Donnelly, Congressman Young, Congresswoman Walorski, and staff of the Subcommittee. On behalf of the Marion County Public Health Department, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to come here today to discuss our efforts to prepare to respond to a mass casualty event in Marion County. I hope this is the first of many opportunities to work with this Subcommittee.

Today I would like to share some of our response capabilities here in Marion County and emphasize the importance of building partnerships between the public and private sectors. Here in Central Indiana, we have built a truly unique healthcare coalition that allows the Health Department, Emergency Medical Services, and other public agencies to effectively collaborate and to work together with our private sector healthcare partners. We are prepared to respond to all hazards, whether natural disasters, disease outbreaks, terrorist threats, or weapons of mass destruction, because we have built a coalition that enables all partners to work together to respond.

**THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT'S ROLE**

The Marion County Public Health Department is responsible for Emergency Support Function (ESF) 8 functions under the National Response Framework, which means the health department is responsible for the public health and medical care needs of the entire population in Marion County during an emergency event. This can include everything from medical treatment to providing clean drinking water and sanitation. In addition, the health department is responsible for coordinating Emergency Support Function (ESF) 11 activities which entails identifying food, water and ice needs and temporary shelter for animals in the aftermath of an emergency.

One of the most important responsibilities of the Health Department is protection against chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high-yield Explosive (CBRNE) threats. To monitor and respond to these threats, the Health Department operates an Environmental Emergency Response team that collaborates with local and state partners including the Indianapolis Fire Department Hazardous Materials (HazMat) team, the Indiana Department of Homeland Security, and the Indiana State Department of Health. This team plays a very important role, especially concerning our response to chemical and biological threats. Because of this team, Central Indiana maintains an excellent state of preparedness for chemical and biological threats.

Marion County Public Health Department is also responsible for the coordinating activities under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's BioWatch program. In partnership with Indiana Departments of Environmental Management and Health, Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department, Hamilton County Health Department, the U.S. Army Civil Support team and the FBI, daily monitoring for the potential of airborne bioterrorism threats occurs.

Our Environmental Emergency Response team responds in conjunction with the Indianapolis Fire Department HazMat team to secure, sample, and process hazardous or suspicious materials, especially when biological hazards are suspected. They respond to all incidents involving suspicious powders, including a recent incident at Riley Children's Hospital at Indiana University Health. Marion County Public Health Department's Environmental Emergency Response Team is the only team in Indiana that keeps a ready supply of appropriate test kits to detect ricin, as well as Anthrax, Botulinum toxin, and poxvirus. While these kits are very costly to maintain, we have made our CBRNE capabilities a priority and have made the financial investments necessary to be able to respond when these events occur. This proved to be a very valuable investment last year when letters containing ricin were being mailed around the country and we were the only Public Health Department in Indiana with the ability to test for ricin.

Another important function that the Marion County Public Health Department performs to protect our community during a biological threat event is to run the Point of Distribution (POD) system that would be responsible for delivering critical medications or vaccinations from either the strategic national stockpile or the state strategic stockpile to the citizens of Marion County. In addition to running these points of distribution, we would also maintain communications with the public to keep them informed of the biological threat and the best practices they can take to respond to that threat. We continuously plan and regularly conduct trainings and drills to ensure that we could effectively distribute vaccines and medication to protect the population of Central Indiana in the event of either a natural or a terrorist biological threat.

Because we have invested in a great team, which allows us to maintain a high level of preparation to respond to environmental emergencies, we are also called on to lend assistance and to be a resource beyond the borders of Marion County. We routinely work with the surrounding counties to provide mutual aid support, engage in collaborative planning, and participate in mutual training exercises with local, state, and federal agencies so that we can be prepared across the entire Central Indiana Region. One of the best demonstrations of this collaborative spirit was evidenced in during the Super Bowl last year, where we maintained a 24-hour support team that worked with the FBI, the EPA, and other federal agencies involved in supporting the event.

Marion County also collaborates to ensure that we have a resilient community by maintaining a volunteer Medical Reserve Corps. We keep an ongoing registry of licensed medical providers who have the ability to serve in the event of a disaster or attack by a weapon of mass destruction, and we call upon these volunteer providers for assistance during emergency events. These providers include physicians and nurses to

provide immediate medical attention, but we also go beyond the immediate medical needs to maintain a registry of volunteers who can treat the deeper health needs of the community, including social workers and psychologists. We recently had an opportunity to deploy some of these volunteers to assist the Central Indiana Community when we responded to the home explosion in Richmond Hills. Our social workers and community psychologist partners worked together with us to help that community heal after dozens of people were evacuated from their homes in response to the explosion.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS**

Marion County has a population of nearly 1 million people, or approximately one sixth of the population of the entire state of Indiana. When you include the population of the surrounding counties of Central Indiana whose residents are not technically a part of our service area, but who frequently utilize hospitals and other care providers within Marion county, healthcare facilities in Marion County could be asked to service the medical needs of up to 1.7 million people. The majority of all healthcare emergency response needs would have to be met by private sector providers. One of the things we realized early on was the critical importance of working together with the private sector to plan for major disasters or weapons of mass destruction.

In order for the Health Department to effectively perform its ESF-8 functions, we also determined that it was essential to form strong partnerships between and amongst the private hospitals, as well as with local public safety partners who would be able to facilitate appropriate responses to emergency events. In order to bring about this capability, we collaborated to form a nonprofit healthcare coalition, the MESH Coalition. MESH is an organization that helps healthcare providers, who are competitors in regular business, work together with the Health Department, public safety agencies, and other private sector organizations to prepare and respond to treats in Central Indiana. No other city has the kind of partnership between public agencies and the private healthcare sector that we have formed here in Marion County.

Our spirit of partnership with private-sector healthcare providers is not limited to hospitals, but also extends to the other healthcare facilities within the county. We partner with dozens of other provider organizations, including community health centers, urgent care facilities, dialysis centers, social workers and psychologists to built preparation throughout the healthcare sector in Central Indiana. One of our key partners is Wishard Health Services. It is the safety net hospital in Central Indiana. Wishard is one of only two Level 1 Trauma Centers in the city, and routinely provides support to mass casualty events. They have a dedicated vice president level executive who is responsible for emergency management issues. Wishard has a special obligation to vulnerable populations during and following disaster/mass-casualty events and takes that responsibility seriously – leading to innovation in outreach and disaster management for these patients. They will shortly be moving to a new facility, in which it will have the opportunity to test its ability to evacuate an entire hospital and relocate patients. Wishard will use emergency management principles, including the Incident Command System (ICS) to organize the move. Wishard houses/hosts MESH, and was an early founding

member of the coalition. Our philosophy is that to develop a prepared community, a community which can be resilient in responding to and recovering from a public health crisis, you must first build a healthy community. A healthy community foundation is required in order to respond to a natural disaster or terrorist situation, which means that people in that community must have access good quality healthcare, a strong social support fabric, and the public resources they need to address a crisis situation.

Chairwoman Brooks, Senator Donnelly, Congressman Young, Congresswoman Walorski, and staff of the Subcommittee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today on our efforts to prepare Central Indiana for a mass casualty event. I would also hope that our the accomplishments we have made in building a public-private healthcare coalition are something that other cities can benefit from to improve their healthcare systems' ability to respond emergencies.

Again, thank you for your leadership and your emphasis on the importance of emergency preparedness.