



**Stakeholder Assessments of the
Administration's National Preparedness
Grant Program Proposal**

Statement of

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presented to the

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Good morning, Chairman Brooks, Ranking Member Payne and members of the subcommittee. My name is William R. Metcalf, EFO, CFO, FIFireE, chief of the North County Fire Protection District, located in Fallbrook, California. Today, I am representing the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) as its president and chairman of the board. I would like to thank the subcommittee for this opportunity to represent the views of local firefighters and EMS responders in the discussion about the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) National Preparedness Grant (NPG) Program proposal.

The IAFC is committed to ensuring that America's first responders have the necessary equipment, staffing and training to protect their communities. In any discussion about grant reform, local first responders must be an equal participant with the states in determining threats, risks and vulnerabilities and in allocating resources to address them.

We remain greatly concerned by the NPG proposal. Twice previously, FEMA has proposed the consolidation of the 16 homeland security grants. The IAFC and other groups representing the fire and emergency service, law enforcement, local governments and other stakeholders have expressed concern with this state-centric approach. The IAFC commends Congress for asking FEMA for more details and not implementing past versions of this proposal.

This year, FEMA submitted authorizing language with its new version of the NPG proposal. While this proposal includes more details, we continue to have serious concerns about the NPG proposal. The IAFC believes that any successful grant reform proposal must treat federal, state and local stakeholders equally in determining risks and threats and in allocating resources and funding to meet these risks.

The homeland security grant programs were created by Congress to help fill gaps in our national preparedness system as identified by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and Hurricane Katrina. Events over the past years, including the Boston Marathon bombing last year, the deadly 2011 tornadoes in Alabama and Missouri and the January 2011 active-shooter incident in Tucson, Arizona, all have demonstrated how FEMA's homeland security grant programs have improved our nation's preparedness.

My agency is located immediately adjacent to Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, and it responded to the massive fires in southern California in 2003 and 2007. Using the State Homeland Security Grant Program and the Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI), we were able to improve regional radio interoperability and develop resilient internal communications, improve the security of our fire stations and train our chiefs and company officers to lead in large-scale and complex incidents.

The success of the FEMA homeland security grants is that they provide an incentive for local fire chiefs, emergency managers, police chiefs, public health officials and state and federal officials to plan, train and exercise together. This preplanning and coordination prevents confusion and saves lives during an incident.

Concerns with the National Preparedness Grant Program

In April 2012, Chief Hank Clemmensen, my predecessor as IAFC president, testified before this committee. He laid out seven principles for an effective homeland security grant program. These principles included concepts like sustainment of existing capabilities, transparency and local engagement. Using this criteria, the new FEMA proposal continues to have serious problems.

One of our greatest concerns is that the NPG still continues to rely on the Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA) to identify risk, threats and vulnerabilities and to allocate funding. Throughout the nation, local involvement in the state THIRAs is sporadic. For example, I have not been involved or consulted in the California THIRA. Local officials and first responders best know the emergency response capabilities and risks to their communities. THIRAs will continue to be flawed without active local involvement.

In addition, we remain concerned that the NPG program focuses on increasing the state administration of the FEMA grants. In many urban areas, the preparedness system relies upon a multistate, multidisciplinary approach. By focusing on a state-based system, the NPG creates stovepipes where current cooperation exists. In the Washington, D.C., area, the National Capital Region incorporates the city of Washington and the states of Maryland and Virginia. While the proposal would create links between the Urban Area Working Groups and the State Administrative Agencies, we are concerned that the NPG's state-centric approach will build barriers between multistate regions.

Additionally, the IAFC is concerned about the capabilities of the UASI cities that have been developed over the years. The administration has indicated that there will be a process to allocate sustainment funding to existing UASIs. However, this process is not described in the authorizing legislation that accompanied the FY 2015 budget request. We are concerned by FEMA's proposal to eliminate the existing legislative language authorizing UASI funding without having clear language that will replace it.

The NPG proposal is designed to build and sustain the core capabilities defined by the National Preparedness Goal. However, the IAFC remains concerned that firefighting is not specifically listed as a core capability in the National Preparedness Goal. Other missions of the fire service are covered, including emergency medical response, hazardous materials response and building code enforcement. However, terrorists deliberately used fire as a weapon during the 2008 Mumbai incident and the 2012 incident in Benghazi to cut access and draw media attention. In addition, the Al-Qaeda magazine, *Inspire*, urged its followers to use wildfire as a weapon here in the United States to cause damage and spread fear. Firefighting will remain a core capability in an effective national response system and must be recognized as such.

The IAFC also is concerned by the elimination of the 25 percent set-aside for the Law Enforcement Terrorism Prevention Program. Currently, FEMA's homeland security grants support intelligence fusion centers and information-sharing between federal, state

and local officials. Federal funding acts as an incentive for local law enforcement to share information and coordinate activities with local fire and EMS departments. In addition, this federal funding incentivizes law enforcement agencies to adopt the National Incident Management System and engage in multidisciplinary planning and exercises.

One problem with the proposed authorizing language is that it would expand the definition of “local unit of government” to include nongovernmental organizations and potentially for-profit entities. FEMA was forced to expand this definition, as it consolidated grants for port authorities, nonprofit organizations and transit agencies into the NPG. However, we think that it creates a dangerous precedent to redefine local governments to include nongovernmental and for-profit organizations.

The IAFC also is concerned by FEMA’s proposal to cut funding for the homeland security grant programs. For FY 2014, Congress appropriated \$1.266 billion for the homeland security grants. FEMA proposes \$1.043 billion for FY 2015. This would result in an approximately 18 percent reduction to homeland security grant funds. In light of the continued terrorist threat to the United States, the IAFC recommends that Congress continue to sustain the FY 2014 funding levels for the FEMA’s homeland security preparedness grants.

Ideas for Improvement of the Existing Grants

Taxpayer funds should be used effectively to improve national emergency preparedness. There are administrative changes to the current grants that FEMA can implement. For example, as Chief James Schwartz, the chair of the IAFC’s Terrorism and Homeland Security Committee, testified last year, FEMA could develop a system for grant recipients to share information about the successful uses of grant funds to develop capabilities. Then, instead of having to reinvent the wheel across the nation, local jurisdictions could learn from each other’s projects to allocate their resources more effectively.

Also, it is important that local stakeholders be treated as equal partners in determining threats, risks, vulnerabilities and capabilities. From a fire and emergency service perspective, all of the resources—both equipment and personnel—are owned by local jurisdictions. Local fire chiefs must be involved in the THIRA process. The IAFC welcomes language in the latest THIRA Guide (Comprehensive Preparedness Guide 201), which urges state emergency managers to use a whole-communities approach to complete their THIRAs by consulting local fire, EMS, law enforcement and public-health departments. Unfortunately, there still is a mixed record on local involvement in the THIRAs.

Conclusion

On behalf of the leadership of America’s fire and EMS departments, I would like to thank the subcommittee for the opportunity to testify at today’s hearing. While we think it is good that FEMA has released more information about this year’s NPG proposal, it

continues to have many of the problems that we have identified in the past. As Congress considers the issue of grant reform, we encourage you to consider directing FEMA to work with all state and local stakeholders to develop a detailed plan. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.