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STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

**On behalf of the
National Emergency Management Association**

**Submitted to the House Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications
United States House of Representatives**

***Ready and Resilient?: Examining Federal Emergency Preparedness and Response
Capabilities***

October 22, 2015

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Introduction

Thank you Chairman McSally, Ranking Member Payne, and members of the subcommittee for holding this important hearing today. As Director of the Florida Division of Emergency Management and President of NEMA, which represents the state emergency management directors of the 50 states, territories, and District of Columbia, I am pleased to be here to discuss preparedness and response capabilities on a national level.

As we look back on the tenth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina and anticipate the upcoming third anniversary of Hurricane Sandy, this timely hearing gives us an opportunity to discuss the lessons we have learned and the changes we are working toward for the future.

As you have heard Administrator Fugate say throughout his tenure, emergency management is a “whole community” endeavor. It involves the public sector, the private sector, voluntary organizations, and individual citizens—all of whom are crucial to preparing for disasters and responding to and recovering from them. While emergency preparedness and response capabilities are critical on the federal level, it is important to emphasize that they are only a part of the capabilities nationwide. In my testimony this morning, I will focus on leveraging the preparedness and response capabilities that we have in our states and localities. Specifically, I will discuss the importance of the Emergency Management Assistance Compact and the value that the Emergency Management Performance Grant plays in assisting the whole community.

National Emergency Preparedness and Response Capabilities

As Hurricane Joaquin moved towards the East Coast, South Carolina closely monitored the storm and its projected tracks. While the Hurricane did not make landfall in South Carolina, moisture from it did. The state received very heavy rainfall for several days. In fact, the official statewide 24-hour rainfall record was exceeded in several locations. This storm led to historic flooding which caused the tragic deaths of 19 people and statewide property damage.

President Barack Obama signed a statewide emergency declaration on October 5, 2015, authorizing federal aid in anticipation of more rain. However, resources from other states were already at work utilizing the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC).

EMAC has played an important role in facilitating collaboration among states and enabling them to share resources and capabilities. When states and the U.S. territories joined together and Congress ratified EMAC (Public Law PL-104-321) in 1996, it created a legal and procedural mechanism whereby emergency response resources such as Urban Search and Rescue Teams could quickly move throughout the country to meet disaster needs. All 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and Guam are members of EMAC and have committed their emergency resources in helping one another during times of disaster or emergency.

Since its ratification by Congress, EMAC has grown significantly in size, volume, and the types of resources states are able to deploy. For example, over 67,000 personnel from a variety of disciplines deployed through EMAC to the Gulf Coast in response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and 12,279 personnel deployed to Texas and Louisiana during Hurricanes Gustav and Ike.

More recent uses of EMAC have included the response for the manhunt in Pennsylvania, severe weather in Mississippi, wildfires in Washington, tropical storms in Hawaii, and the historic snowstorms in Massachusetts.

For the historic flooding in South Carolina, 849 people have been deployed through EMAC to assist with response and recovery efforts. Resources and personnel have been received from eight states including Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, North Dakota, and Tennessee. In fact, additional states made offers of assistance.

Through EMAC, capabilities and resources such as Incident Management Teams, Damage Assessment Teams, a National Flood Insurance Program Administrator, a Volunteer Agency Liaison, Hazard Mitigation Officers, a Recovery Chief, Public Assistance Officers, and Individual Assistance Officers were deployed to South Carolina. EMAC has made it easier for states to assist each other effectively—with the added benefit of lessening the need for federal resources in the process.

Utilizing EMAC not only benefits the receiving state but also those who are deployed. The County Emergency Management Director, Billy Estep, from Nassau County, Florida said the following upon returning from a mission in South Carolina, “I want to stress the most important lesson learned from this deployment: no matter how hard we try or how sophisticated our process, we cannot recreate this type of learning in an exercise environment. I implore Florida Division of Emergency Management (FDEM) leadership to continue and expand their obvious support for these opportunities, and keep utilization of these teams acutely focused on the all-hazards concepts which made us nimble enough to adapt to our wide-breadth of assigned missions. I feel these opportunities are vital to our preparedness efforts both locally and statewide.”

Building Capacity with EMPG

In addition to leveraging EMAC for resources during disaster response, states and locals also build capacity and enhance their capability to respond to disasters when they utilized the Emergency Management Performance Grants (EMPG). EMPG is the only source of federal funding directed to state and local governments for planning, training, exercises, and key professional expertise for all-hazards emergency preparedness. The money is often used to conduct risk and hazard assessments and support emergency operations centers which are the coordination hubs for all disaster response. The program also provides public education and outreach, enhanced interoperable communications capabilities, and the ability to manage statewide alerts and warnings.

For example, in fiscal year 2014, EMPG significantly contributed to public awareness and outreach campaign efforts. Local, tribal, and state emergency management officials conducted 5,886 local and tribal and 1,295 statewide citizen and community preparedness outreach campaigns. According to state responses, these outreach programs benefited 135,568,054 residents while locally-specific programs impacted 24,608,092 citizens.

Recipients of this grant continue demonstrating a strong commitment; for every dollar of federal funds invested, at least that much is matched by both grantees and sub-grantees. In the absence

of these funds, state and local governments would struggle to maintain the personnel or capabilities necessary to build and sustain an effective emergency management system. EMPG stands as the beacon of Congressional commitment to ensuring communities and states are more ready to prepare, mitigate, respond, and recover from any number of emergencies and disasters. EMPG does far more, however, than provide funds for planning, training, exercises, and communications. EMPG must continue to be strengthened and maintained through shared investments.

Continuing to Improve Our Policies and Programs

After Hurricane Katrina, Congress passed the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006. This legislation expanded the FEMA mission, creating stronger regions and adding the responsibility of homeland security preparedness.

After Hurricane Sandy, in response to the needs of the state and local governments, Congress once again immediately took action to make serious improvements to the Stafford Act through the Sandy Recovery Improvement Act. This legislation not only helped facilitate a smooth recovery in the Sandy-impacted area, but also forever changes FEMA programs and policies. Some of the provisions of SRIA, such as the debris removal pilot program, have been supported by NEMA for many years.

Just as we reviewed policies and programs after Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy we must continue to review the programs and policies that we use today. The measure of success related to disaster response and recovery lies in the overarching programs which help guide our policies. In order to gauge our success we must continue to review and reform programs such as the National Flood Insurance Program.

Much attention has been paid to the NFIP over the last several years, and rightly so. Reforms have been implemented that are designed to stabilize the program, but the desired outcome is still many years away. In the meantime, however, we as a nation are still grossly underinsured against the threat posed by flooding, our most prevalent hazard. Time after time we watch as our communities flood, only to hear from residents that they did not have the appropriate coverage. In the absence of insurance, they are reliant upon their own fiscal ability, the generosity of the charitable organizations, and federal and state aid that is not designed to make them whole. Such situations delay the recovery of a community and threaten its very existence. We as a nation must redouble our efforts to design a system that helps people evaluate their individual risk and plan accordingly while simultaneously reducing our collective risk.

The lack of appropriate coverage is not limited to flood; too few Americans truly understand their vulnerability to earthquakes and landslides. The Cascadia Subduction Zone (CSZ) "megathrust" fault is a long dipping fault that stretches from Northern Vancouver Island to Cape Mendocino California. This area creates the largest earthquakes in the world, and has produced magnitude 9.0 or greater earthquakes in the past, and undoubtedly will in the future. New research using land deposits found at the bottom of the ocean points to a one in three chance of a major earthquake in the Pacific Northwest in the next 50 years. Recovering from a large-scale

earthquake in this area would be complicated tremendously by the lack of appropriate insurance coverage, and would result in tremendous costs to government at all levels.

Disasters: Growing in Intensity

The historic flooding in South Carolina is just one example of the growing intensity in disasters. The year 2015 has been among the most devastating on record for wildfires in the United States, with more than 9 million acres burned so far this year, according to the National Interagency Fire Center. Over the course of the year, fires have stretched across the western half of the country, and are currently raging in California, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, Oregon, Wyoming, and Texas.

The number of acres destroyed by fires have been rising significantly, which experts attribute to hotter, drier conditions that make the blazes harder to contain. With such a high volume of fires, floods, and other disasters the need for mitigation efforts is growing increasingly more important. Mitigation activities can take many forms and the use of mitigation programs often differ by region. What does not differ, however, is the return on investment of these programs. FEMA's mitigation programs have been effective in reducing the property damage, personal and commercial hardship, as well as long-lasting monetary burdens after a disaster.

Mitigation is the first and the last step in a jurisdiction's overall readiness. And while many communities have the desire to harden their infrastructure, they lack the resources and technical ability necessary to do so. If we are to truly ensure that we are prepared as a nation, we must increase our efforts to prepare our built environment for future disasters by incentivizing and facilitating mitigation. This point was made in the recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, *Hurricane Sandy: An Investment Strategy Could Help the Federal Government Enhance National Resilience for Future Disasters* that reviewed federal efforts to strengthen disaster resilience during Hurricane Sandy recovery. The report addressed how federal recovery funds were used to enhance resilience, the extent to which states and localities were able to maximize federal funding to enhance resilience; and actions that could enhance resilience for future disasters.

State and local officials from the states affected by Hurricane Sandy GAO contacted, reported that they were able to effectively leverage federal programs to enhance disaster resilience, but also experienced challenges that could result in missed opportunities. The challenges fell into three categories:

- Implementation challenges with PA and HMGP—for example, officials reported that FEMA officials did not always help them pursue opportunities to incorporate mitigation into permanent construction recovery projects;
- Limitations on comprehensive risk reduction approaches in a postdisaster environment—for example, officials reported difficulties with navigating multiple funding streams and various regulations of the different federal programs funded after Hurricane Sandy; and
- Local ability and willingness to participate—for example, officials reported that some home and business owners were unwilling or unable to bear the required personal cost share for a home-elevation or other mitigation project.

This report indicates that the current program works, but is constrained by its structure and implementation. Just as FEMA has designed its' response program to be "survivor-centric", it should also work to develop mitigation programs that are "community-centric" and administered in a way to make mitigation a clear and viable solution for the future.

Understanding What Works

While we still have work to do in reviewing and implementing policies and programs, FEMA has undertaken efforts to improve many processes and programs. The agency has made many advances in refining their back office operations such as improving their hiring, management, information technology, and procurement systems. FEMA has also encouraged the use of current codes and standards in existence for mitigation rather than using cost benefit analysis formulas.

The Public Assistance Reengineering is an excellent example of FEMA working to improve and maximize existing programs. While it is still too early to determine the effectiveness of the change, we are pleased with the effort and urge that similar reforms be considered by other programs that impact our ability to mitigate, prepare, and recover.

Throughout their strategic plan, FEMA has made it a priority to build capability for catastrophic disasters. They have moved the focus away from being singularly on Stafford Act programs and instead looked at the nation's resources to recover. Preparing for catastrophic disasters has led FEMA to ensure that all employees are now deployable emergency managers. The agency has started to train each employee, regardless of the department or position, so that they can be deployed as needed.

FEMA has also made it a priority to become an expeditionary organization. The agency has increased and improved engagement across the preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation missions while also working towards reducing disaster risk nationally. The agency has focused on providing mitigation programs with a focus on future conditions and not historical averages. The agency has worked to ensure that the whole community uses the best available data and analytic tools to make better risk-informed decisions before, during, and after disasters.

Conclusion

If we hope to see effective preparedness and response to disasters, we must utilize the capabilities that we have as a nation and allocate resources to most effectively meet the need. The ability to share resources will only strengthen the nation's capability as a whole. One of the most valuable partnerships in the whole community is between state emergency management agencies. It's important to acknowledge that increasing the nation's preparedness and response capabilities doesn't mean increasing FEMA's capabilities. Through programs such as EMAC, which has been invaluable in deploying assets throughout the country and enabling states to support each other more effectively, we are able to reduce the need for federal resources. When states work with each other and build on the capabilities in their own states it results in strong charitable partners like the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army, or any of the scores of other organizations that are there when Americans need them.

Going forward, we must encourage greater investments as states work with one another to reduce the need for federal assistance, reduces federal administrative costs, reduces property damages, and most importantly save lives. We should also to continue to support FEMA's grant programs, such as the Emergency Management Performance Grant, funded at a mere \$350 million to be allocated between all states, the District of Columbia, U.S. territories and thousands of local jurisdictions, facilitates strong state and local emergency management agencies that respond to the vast majority of incidents every day in our country. We appreciate the continued support of this subcommittee to the emergency management community as we work together in forming new policies and procedures aimed at making these disasters less impactful on our communities and constituents.

I thank you for the opportunity to testify today and welcome any questions you may have.