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WRITTEN STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

On behalf of the
State of Louisiana

Submitted to the House Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Emergency Management and Technology
***“Emergency Preparedness: Examining Federal, State, and Local
Coordination in Coastal Communities”***

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INTRODUCTION

Thank you, Chairman D'Esposito, Ranking Members Thompson and Carter, and distinguished members of the Committee for the invitation to testify today and for holding this hearing in New Orleans.

I am Casey Tingle, Director of the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (GOHSEP). GOHSEP is the state agency responsible for the preservation of the lives and property of the people of the state of Louisiana through the coordination of emergency preparedness, response, recovery and homeland security activities. As Director of GOHSEP and on behalf of my colleagues in state emergency management, we thank you for holding this discussion on Emergency Preparedness: Examining Federal, State, and Local Coordination in Coastal Communities. I also want to thank the other partners providing testimony today. Each of them represents an important component of the response and recovery network and each agency represented has made significant contributions to the recovery of Louisiana from disasters.

The relationship between federal, state, and local emergency management is critical. Each maintains separate authorities and capabilities but must connect and support one another to effectively and timely save lives and protect property. State emergency management relies on the capacity, relationships and preparedness of our local partners, so the success of FEMA is also determined by the strength of the states. The relationship between state and federal emergency management is sometimes stressed, but no disagreement cannot be overcome by understanding each other's priorities, remaining flexible, and maintaining the shared goal of focusing on disaster survivors.

DISASTER HISTORY DECLARATIONS

From 2016 through 2023, Louisiana has been impacted by roughly 251 local incidents involving some level of state coordination or support of these, 50 were state emergency declarations and 21 federal disaster declarations.

For state fiscal year 2023 alone, GOHSEP responded to 39 events and activated the State Emergency Operations Center for 7 of those events totaling 48 days of activation.

Notable events that affected the state include multiple severe weather and tornado events, winter weather and the saltwater intrusion of the Mississippi River. There were also numerous local emergencies including water system outages. A total of seven incidents warranted a State of Emergency Declaration from the Governor.

In that time, we have had several opportunities to address coordination and improvements with other federal agencies like FEMA and local governments and we welcome the committee to this discussion as we look to remain dedicated to the development and maintenance of programs that meet our core mission, are cost effective, improve communication at the local, state, and federal levels, and assist Louisiana in moving closer to disaster independence.

While FEMA and our other federal partners play critical roles in our nation's response infrastructure, response is happening every day at the state and local level that does not rise to the level of a federal declaration.

PROGRESS IN RESPONSE POSTURE

Since Hurricane Katrina in 2005, much progress has been made in the response posture in the State of Louisiana as evidenced by the response to a number of major disaster events. While no response is perfect and each event is different, the level of preparedness, collaboration and practice continue to demonstrate improvements at all levels. Coordination with key partners is continuous and benefits from trusted relationships built over many years of working together in exercises and real-world experience. The risks we face continue to grow in severity and frequency but so does the commitment to preparedness at all levels.

STATE INVESTMENT IN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Without a thriving state and local emergency management system, many of the aforementioned events would likely have required costly federal support. Louisiana is investing more resources in the building and supporting of this capacity at the local level by increasing by \$3 million the amount of Emergency Management Performance Grant funding that is passed through to our local partners. In addition, increasing investments in cyber response and preparedness capacity, investments in new shelter and warehouse capacity, as well as managing a state temporary housing program are all examples of efforts to improve the level of preparedness and the capacity to respond and recover for Louisiana.

IMPORTANCE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE GRANT FUNDING

One of the most important resources supporting state and local emergency management agencies build capacity is the Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG). With a one-to-one matching requirement at the local and state levels, this program represents one of the best values in federal spending. EMPG continues as a critical driver of progress and success made across the country in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from all hazards. The program's success is shared by all levels of government and relies heavily on the continued, and decades-long, commitment of Congress.

The emergency management community is requesting Congress codifies one of the COVID-19 supplemental amounts of \$100 million to increase EMPG to an overall funding level of \$455 million in FY24. This will move the community toward ensuring all eligible states and jurisdictions fully-participate in the program and matches the approach Louisiana has taken.

Further, legislation filed in the Senate, S. 3071 Disaster Management Costs Modernization Act, would provide another critical funding stream to support preparedness of communities across the country by allowing for the roll-over of management costs from one disaster to another. This legislation is supported by the National Emergency Management Association (NEMA), International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM), Big City Emergency Managers (BCEM), BuildStrong Coalition, and National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (NVOAD). Support in the House for this approach would be a tangible step towards supporting better preparedness at the state-level.

STATE SUPPORT WITH RECOVERY AND MITIGATION PROGRAMS

GOHSEP provides grant management and technical services under the Public Assistance (PA) and Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) programs. FEMA's Public Assistance PA Program

provides supplemental grants to state, tribal, territorial, local governments, and certain types of private non-profits so that communities can quickly respond to and recover from major disasters or emergencies. For context, GOHSEP manages \$23 billion in PA funding across 20 open disasters, \$3.5 billion in Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funding across 18 open disasters, and an additional \$478 million in annual mitigation grant funding. For the state's 2023 fiscal year, GOHSEP worked with eligible sub-grantees and FEMA to fund over 2,300 new PA grants representing recovery funding of \$1.9 billion and supplemental amendments to grants totaling \$329 million. During this same period, GOHSEP reviewed and approved over 4,200 reimbursement requests worth \$1.1 billion dollars recovery funding.

Despite continued good-faith efforts by FEMA to reduce the complexity of these programs, the pathway to accessing these funds remains a real challenge to many communities. Oftentimes the fear of claw back or burden of complexity results in impacted communities growing frustrated with the process or withdrawing altogether at a time when the assistance is most needed. In order to increase the accessibility and timeliness of this process, GOHSEP has implemented several strategies to try and reduce the administrative burden of these programs.

Example 1: State Contracts to Support Local Entities

In 2020, GOHSEP procured state contract vendors to assist sub-grantees impacted by a disaster in getting immediate assistance with obtaining and receiving both PA and HMGP funding. This new process allows the contract support to engage early on and the sub-grantee is spared the administrative burden of a procurement process when they are still often in active response mode. In FY 23, these vendors continued their work with over 130 sub-grantees across five disasters from obligation of funding through grant closeout.

Example 2: Hazard Mitigation Plan Support

Approved and adopted hazard mitigation plans are a requirement for the State and local governments, including special districts, to be eligible for HMA grant funding. In addition to securing FEMA funding to update the plans, GOHSEP provides assistance throughout the planning process to ensure that plans are consistent with FEMA guidance and are approved in a timely fashion. Currently, 48 parish plans are approved, and 16 parish plans are in the process of being updated. Another example of this support is the partnership with Louisiana State University's Stephenson Disaster Management Institute (LSU SDMI) to provide assistance with local hazard mitigation plan updates. For the past 10 years, the state offers this assistance at no cost to the parish to ensure that all 64 parishes have an approved Hazard Mitigation plan.

Example 3: Technical Program Support

One of the most important responsibilities in managing these programs is to ensure sub-grantees are able to navigate the rules of the program and maximize their federal grants. GOHSEP has dedicated staff and contract support available to assist with successfully navigating technical program requirements to ensure that FEMA reviews and determinations are correct and consistent with the letter and intent of law, regulation and policy. One example of this work involves how to appropriately account for insurance proceeds. GOHSEP was recently successful in assisting Iberia Parish School Board with approval of \$1.7 million in PA funding related to this issue and in assisting other sub-grantees with an additional \$1.5 million due to incorrect insurance reductions.

Example 4: State Program Liaison Staff

Since Hurricane Katrina, GOHSEP has assigned staff to serve as program liaison between FEMA and sub-grantees for PA and HMA funding. These staff are assigned to work with sub-grantees to explain program requirements and timelines, to assist with complicated project applications, and to flag issues for GOHSEP leadership. These staff help ensure consistency and responsiveness in the program delivery and collaboration between federal and local partners.

Example 5: State Funded Debris Funding

While Louisiana did not have any disasters that met the criteria for a Federal disaster declaration in FY23, there were significant events that exceeded local abilities to respond and recover. In order to preserve lives, safety and public health; the State agreed to fund the response and debris operations necessary for the impacted communities to recover. GOHSEP made modifications to its existing procedures to review and disburse this funding. GOHSEP also supported the impacted communities by providing outreach and technical support for their debris operations. The delivery of this program has encouraged more robust debris management planning and has expedited recovery from more localized events such as tornadoes.

INVESTMENT IN CYBER PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

GOHSEP partnered with the Division of Administration – Office of Technology Services (OTS), the Louisiana National Guard (LANG), and the Louisiana State Police to offer cybersecurity incident management and response assistance to State, local, and private Critical Infrastructure and Key Resources (CIKR) throughout the state. Emergency Support Function (ESF) -17 has been activated in an open State disaster declaration since 2019 and has responded to more than 120 individual State, local, and private CIKR. During state fiscal year 2023, 22 ESF-17 responses were conducted.

Additionally, GOHSEP has partnered with ESF-17 partners to develop a Cyber Incident Management and Response training program and has trained organizations throughout higher education, the State's court systems, K-12 school systems, and municipalities across the state. During State Fiscal Year 2022-2023, 4 Cyber Incident Management and Response training events and exercises were conducted.

STATE AND LOCAL CYBER GRANT PROGRAM

In preparation for submission of the State's 2022 State and Local Grant Program (SLCGP) application, the Louisiana Cybersecurity Assurance Program and associated plan were developed. This represents a progression from a strictly reactive cybersecurity posture through incident responses involving Louisiana's ESF-17 agencies to the development of a proactive posture, to equitably balance Louisiana's cybersecurity efforts. The plan resulted from ESF-17: Cybersecurity's successful proofs of concept and was specifically developed to allow for efficient and effective cybersecurity information sharing and coordination, and to leverage the State's purchasing power (on behalf of the local and rural entities) to receive discounted high-volume prices on key assets such as software licenses and hardware for state-wide distribution. The key project from the 2022 grant focuses on End Point Detection resources provided for

local entities across the state. This approach enjoyed broad support from all partners on cyber planning committee and further demonstrates commitment to local partners.

COMPLEXITY ISSUES WITH RECOVERY/MITIGATION

While the response posture continues to improve, the challenges of recovery and mitigation continue. Lack of alignment, competing timelines, duplicative interactions, insurance challenges and the overall lack of affordable housing all serve to leave many disaster survivors and communities in a cycle of frustration and despair. The slow timeline of these programs combined with subsequent event further stress a depleted network of non-profit and faith-based partners. Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funds offer the promise of long-term recovery and flexibility but many times these promises are not fulfilled. Ask families that have to navigate multiple programs, applications, rules, and timelines for their feedback in you will hear confusion, missed opportunities and short-term programs standing in the way of long-term solutions. H.R. 1796: Disaster Survivors Fairness Act of 2023 and S. 1528: Disaster Assistance Simplification Act both offer helpful solutions to these challenges. Thank you for your attention to these issues.

INSURANCE ISSUES

At a time when local and state partners continue to increase investments in coastal protection and restoration, updating statewide building codes, and creating new mitigation programs, the availability, affordability and performance gaps threaten the future of many communities in our state. The lack of transparency and affordability for the National Flood Insurance Program mean that families are now priced out of their communities in some cases after investing their hard-earned funds to elevate their home as well as local taxation for flood protection. For wind insurance, the slow and convoluted claims process and the increasing reliance on the costly state insurer of last resort mean that recovery is slower, stressful and often incomplete.

CONCLUSION

On behalf of the state of Louisiana, thank you again for holding this hearing and drawing attention to the needs of our community. Thank you for your attention to the challenges and complexities of recovery that all too often fade into the background once the immediate attention has passed. We should commit to leaning forward, removing duplicated programs, and effort to look at the process from the survivor's point of view. Working together, aligning efforts and empowering communities to prepare for recovery in the same way they prepare for response will position us for the challenges ahead.