



Testimony of Jeffrey Walker, President

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On

Assessing the Nation's State of Preparedness: A Federal, State, and Local Perspective

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Chairman Brooks, Ranking Member Payne, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, I would like to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony on this important topic.

I am Jeffrey Walker, the President of the International Association of Emergency Managers, U.S. Council. I served 13 ½ years as Director of the Licking County Ohio Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management.

IAEM-USA is our nation's largest association of emergency management professionals, with 5,000 members including emergency managers at the state and local government levels, tribal nations, the military, colleges and universities, private business and the nonprofit sector. Most of our members are U.S. city and county emergency managers who perform the crucial function of coordinating and integrating the efforts at the local level to prepare for, mitigate the effects of, respond to, and recover from all types of disasters including terrorist attacks.

We appreciate the opportunity to talk about the gains that have been made in preparedness, the remaining challenges, some local perspectives on capabilities and the further steps needed to enhance them.

Like an imposing and beautiful edifice is made up of individual parts, so goes our national preparedness. The brick and stone of preparedness in our local jurisdictions make up the walls of State preparedness, which together, form the overall shape of national preparedness. While we admire the look and design of the final, overall edifice, we must appreciate the value and importance of the individual parts that make the construct assume its final shape.

And, like the fact that the building will not stand without the individual bricks and stones supporting the overall structure, so too, goes our national preparedness.

At the local government level, the emergency managers play an essential role – bringing together the stakeholders (public / private / and non-governmental organizations) for a cohesive and workable plan in response to a disaster. They are the people who are charged with the responsibility to ensure horizontal coordination between the departments of local government and vertical coordination between local governments, state governments, and the Federal government. They are responsible for making sure that all missions of emergency management (mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery) are able to be accomplished at the local level.

Let us take a look at some of the tools that allow local Emergency Managers to perform their vital role in National preparedness.

Emergency Management Performance Grant

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) is vital funding to local emergency managers and has been called the backbone of the Emergency Management System. EMPG is fundamentally different from the suite of post September 11, 2001 homeland security grants. EMPG has a history stretching back to the 1950's when it was recognized that there was a Federal interest in building emergency management capacity at the state and local levels. Its original authorization was in the Civil Defense Act of 1950, as amended. EMPG requires both state governments and local governments to invest one local dollar for each grant dollar received. It also requires various performance measures in order to continue participation. IAEM-USA recognizes that all disasters start and end at the local level which emphasizes the importance of building and sustaining this capacity at the local governmental level—and EMPG funding should not be invested exclusively in State governments alone. Funding from EMPG frequently makes a difference as to whether or not a qualified person is present to perform these duties in a local jurisdiction. We are grateful that Congress has recognized the importance and uniqueness of EMPG by supporting that it be maintained as separate account within FEMA. It is important to have a grant focused on building emergency management capability for those entities at the local government level statutorily charged with the responsibilities of coordinating mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

Individual and Family Preparedness

One of the challenges of local emergency managers is to encourage individuals and families to prepare. A report called “Preparedness in America: Research Insights to Increase Individual, Organizational, and Community Action” was released in September 2013 by FEMA. The report acknowledges, “[a]s disasters continue to impact our Nation, the role of individuals and the importance of engaging all sectors in reducing the impact of disasters has become increasingly evident. (Page 1)”

It is clear to me that in America there are many factors that influence how preparedness becomes relevant to each and every citizen. The attitudes and the experiences of our citizens either encourage or discourage them from taking preparedness seriously. When preparedness information is provided for where we live, work, and play it must be easy to understand and apply. Opportunities to review, discuss, and exercise family preparedness plans help make preparedness a personal goal. Unless we become personally committed to being prepared we will not be ready for the next disaster or emergency. Each community has various “networks” that need to be encouraged to join the preparedness “team.” Only when the time is taken to reach out and educate these networks about the need for personal preparedness will the whole community plan be successful.

Emergency Management Institute (EMI)

The Emergency Management Institute (EMI), located in Emmitsburg, Maryland, provides vitally needed training to State, local and tribal government emergency managers through on-campus classes, a curriculum developed for field deployment and distance learning. This “crown jewel” of emergency management training and doctrine has made tremendous progress over the past three years in the development of vitally needed training programs for state and local emergency managers.

We are particularly pleased with the progress made in the development of the Emergency Management Professional Program (EMPP) which includes the National Emergency Management Foundations, Leadership and Executive Academies. These multi-course academies will enhance the education and training opportunities of the current and next generation of emergency managers by focusing content on the critically important core competencies which were developed as part of the project.

National Planning System

IAEM-USA is an active participant in developing the National Planning System (NPS) Curriculum. We look forward to the final product which will be focused on moving planners from all disciplines to the same common operating picture and lexicon, which will increase

awareness of their impact on Emergency Management. For example, municipal planners should be aware of the hazards within the community so that they avoid development and construction within the areas impacted by the hazard.

The NPS efforts have strongly engaged the stakeholders in identifying ways to be more inclusive of Emergency Management. We cautioned them to not start from scratch. Instead, we suggested that they identify the gaps and develop steps to remove them by implementing courses that provide the skills necessary.

The stakeholders participating in this effort ranged from certified planners, the Military, the FBI, state and local law enforcement, FEMA, local emergency managers, National Flood Plain Managers, land use planners and many others.

The new training curriculum results in the potential of up to three certificates for those with successful completion. It provides a challenge to planners, enhancing their existing knowledge. Planning is at the core of what we do in emergency management. If the work invested in building the foundation of the NPS is carried through the rest of this project, IAEM-USA is confident the training will have a great deal of validity.

Congress frequently gets to hear about federal programs being rolled out without consulting with stakeholders. We're here to let you know that this one is not one of those programs. There has been extensive consultation with the stakeholders, and this program will be the better for it. By building on what has gone before and by being inclusive of a wide range of stakeholders this program will be well built. This is a program that we expect to have follow-through that results in actions that will have a meaningful impact on our preparedness.

Building Local Capabilities

Emergency Management capabilities are being built across our nation at the local government level. Many of the local jurisdictions – as well as the State of Mississippi – are being very active in building emergency management capabilities at the local level. Mississippi is subject to a wide array of hazards including hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, ice storms, earthquakes, and technological hazards. Together, the locals and the State of Mississippi have built a strong partnership to prepare for these hazards. Mississippi passes through a minimum of 60% of its allocated EMPG funding to local government emergency management offices and spends the remainder on programs designed to support locals.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the local jurisdictions in Mississippi identified what their highest priority mitigation actions were, and the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency worked with them and FEMA to fulfill those priorities. Hundreds of generators were purchased for shelters and critical infrastructure identified by the locals. Over 120 Community “safe rooms”

and “361” Shelters with a capacity of over 50,000 were constructed to provide individuals, communities, and schools with a place to take shelter from natural hazards in Mississippi.

Another local capability being built is the Metropolitan Medical Response System (MMRS). It has played a critically important role in a number of communities, but today I’d like to share with you a story from Huntsville, Alabama about MMRS and also provide some background on the program.

One of our IAEM-USA members, John “Rusty” Russell is the Emergency Management Director for Huntsville, Alabama. He tells me that MMRS funding has been the cornerstone of their medical and responder team building since 2002. They have been able to develop plans and build medical response capability in fourteen counties across north Alabama. They were able to provide training and exercises that have added cohesion to the way traditional responders and medical professionals work together during emergencies.

In November, 2007, a Huntsville City School bus with a driver and 41 students plunged seventy-five feet from an interstate overpass in Huntsville. The bus landed vertically and toppled over killing three students and injuring several others. The response was immediate and working within the MMRS plan forty students were transported to two major hospitals within the first fifty minutes after the accident. The actual emergency part of the response was quickly and definitively over after one hour although the media frenzy and the investigation lasted for months. The very same responders and hospital personnel had participated in an eerily similar exercise just days before which involved a simulated airplane crash.

Since the inception of the MMRS program in 1996 under the then US Health Resources and Services Administration it grew to 124 jurisdictions covering approximately 75% of the US population. MMRS programs began building healthcare coalitions 12 years before the recent initiative by the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR) at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The latest guidance for the HHS Funding Opportunity Announcement is similar in intent and uses wording similar to the original MMRS jurisdiction deliverables. The MMRS program was moved to the US Department of Homeland Security in 2004 and continued to build cross-disciplinary public health and medical emergency capabilities in accordance with federal guidance under the Target Capabilities List.

Every MMRS jurisdiction has its success stories. In recent years MMRS built preparedness and response capabilities were used in Pima County Arizona to respond to the “Gabby Giffords” Shooting, in the Aurora Colorado Theater shootings, and at the Boston Marathon Bombings. Successes and ongoing critical analysis can be directly attributed to MMRS planning, training, and coordination, which has been replicated across the US. As a country we are facing the very real possibility that these valuable resources and capabilities will fade away as federal agencies decide what the priorities of the locals should be and seem to ignore the MMRS success story. Since 2012 MMRS has not been funded as a US Department of Homeland Security stand-alone program, but is an “allowable expense” to be decided at the State level. Some MMRS jurisdictions have fortunately still received some funding for MMRS activities, but a majority of MMRS jurisdictions face certain “extinction” within the next 12 months if they do not receive sustainment funding. The final year of the MMRS program funding (Federal Fiscal Year 2011)

was approximately \$28 million; dollar for dollar those funds have yielded the greatest return on preparedness funds than any other US DHS program. A minority of MMRS jurisdictions may be absorbed into other systems but the reality is the capabilities that have been built will be lost. The newer initiative from US HHS ASPR is starting from ground zero in its endeavors to build healthcare coalitions based on the Whole of Community approach and in many states it is a hospital-centered program for which inter-agency cooperation can be an afterthought. The best realistic result would be for US HHS ASPR to receive increased funding to then directly fund and reinvigorate the MMRS program and enhance and expand what has already been built to include more communities. The top down program driven at the State level does not have as great of a chance to succeed when it sometimes disregards the locals which are the community in Whole of Community.

Measuring Preparedness

IAEM-USA released a paper called “Preparedness: A Principled Approach to Return on Investment.” <http://www.iaem.com/documents/Preparedness-Principled-Approach-to-ROI-11Aug2011.pdf>. (Overview available at <http://www.iaem.com/documents/overview-ROI.pdf>)

Challenging economic conditions have meant that, in addition to the Federal government, local, state, tribal, and territory jurisdictions have also been carefully examining where they will invest their resources. All resource investments are being evaluated including those related to emergency management. Specifically, local, state, tribal, and territory jurisdictions, and Congress want to know “How can we tell if we are getting a return on our investments in emergency management?”

The answer to this question has been historically delivered through reciting anecdotal stories or visually displaying data related to the things we can count—what we have purchased and activities we have undertaken—in maps, charts, tables, and graphs. Unfortunately, these stories and data have had little meaning absent a framework against which to interpret them.

Jurisdictions at all levels invest in emergency management preparedness activities to ensure, to the degree possible, that their jurisdiction is ready to efficiently and effectively respond to and recover from hazard events. Thus, the question we must answer when considering return on investment related to emergency management is, “To what extent are we prepared?” To this point jurisdictions at all levels have not been able to answer this question satisfactorily.

It may be easiest to introduce what a meaningful framework against which to measure preparedness would entail if we first begin at the end with IAEM-USA’s vision of what a prepared jurisdiction (at any level) would look like.

A prepared jurisdiction is one that engages in preparedness actions guided by professional emergency managers and professional emergency management programs. The jurisdiction’s preparedness actions are driven by the risks that they face. The jurisdiction has comprehensively considered all known hazards, vulnerabilities, and possible impacts and actively engages in preparedness actions related to mitigation, response, and recovery. The jurisdiction is progressive by incorporating innovations, technologies, and best practices as they ready themselves for future hazard events. The jurisdiction’s preparedness actions have provided a legitimate basis upon which to act in the wake of hazard events but are not so rigid as to lack the flexibility to respond to unanticipated issues. The stakeholders in the jurisdiction (e.g., fire, police, public works, elected officials) are integrated by

their use of common technologies, systems, and management processes. The jurisdiction operates in a collaborative organizational environment wherein inclusiveness, relationships based on trust, ongoing interactions between stakeholders, open communication, and consensus-based decision making are the norm. And, finally, the prepared jurisdiction would be coordinated; the stakeholders within the jurisdiction would know and accept their roles, have identified the procedures necessary to fulfill their roles, and have practiced the fulfillment of their roles in conjunction with other stakeholders.

A prepared jurisdiction is the goal of every emergency management practitioner and every emergency management program. Bringing about the description above is the reason emergency management exists. The EMPG program allows emergency management to work toward these outcomes; therefore, our objectives and measures associated with EMPG should be designed to measure progress towards these goals.

IAEM-USA suggests in *Preparedness* that a framework of preparedness outcomes based on the accepted *Principles of Emergency Management* (2007) should be used to derive meaningful objectives and measures for the preparedness grant program most valued by local emergency managers--EMPG. This argument is supported by decades of disaster and emergency management research. The outcomes include professionalism, risk-driven, comprehensiveness, progressiveness, flexibility, integration, collaboration, coordination. The fact is the equipment, supplies, and systems we buy and the activities we undertake with EMPG funds *are* critical because they contribute to our ability to achieve these outcomes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the assessment of our nation's preparedness is neither simple nor straight forward. We do know what a prepared community looks like and we continue to make progress toward that goal with our key partners at the local, state and federal levels of government, private enterprise, and nongovernmental organizations.

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