



Save the Children.

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**Testimony before the US House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Homeland Security**  
**Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response and Communications**  
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***“The Future of FEMA:  
Stakeholder Recommendations for the Next Administrator”***

Chairman Donovan, Ranking Member Payne, and esteemed Members of the Homeland Security Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the future of FEMA.

My name is Richard Bland and I am the National Director of Policy, Advocacy and Development at Save the Children.

At Save the Children, we believe that every child deserves a healthy start, the opportunity to learn, and protection from harm. It is in this last vein, protection from harm, that I want to talk to you today.

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Imagine where you were 12 years ago, in the late summer of 2005, when you first heard about Hurricane Katrina. Remember how shocked you were when the levees broke? When the death toll began to mount and when you saw the seemingly endless images of people on rooftops and in boats and wading in water struggling to survive? It was a watershed moment not just for our country, but also for Save the Children.

You see, Save the Children has been responding to emergencies around the world for nearly a century but NEVER domestically. The thinking was the richest nation in the world had it covered, so no need to worry. But then the reports started coming in. The TV images. The cries for help. And no shortage of children in need. So just in case, we began to call responders along the Gulf Coast. Government, Agencies, nonprofits. We asked the heads of the shelters how many children they had and at which shelters. The response was, “we have no idea.” NO IDEA.

Many more of our questions went unanswered in the days that followed. And as a result Save the Children decided to deploy to the Gulf Coast in its first major disaster response effort within the United States.



Since Katrina, we have deployed to every major disaster (including 6 disasters in 2016 alone); while at the same time, we have also advocated strongly with federal and state officials to ensure children are adequately prioritized in governmental planning, response and recovery.

Katrina was a shocking moment for all of us.

- **As many as 300,000 children were forced from their homes.**
- **5,000 children were separated from their parents.**
- **Did you know it took 7 months to reunite the last child with her parents?**

But the problem of reunification is not restricted to mass-scale emergencies like Katrina. Today, children are still facing many of the same risks from an emergency as they did 12 years ago.

- **Just remember: every single day 70 million children are separated from their parents. And disasters can strike anywhere at any time.**

Fortunately, we know how to address many of these risks-- Congress and the President created the National Commission on Children and Disasters. And Save the Children was honored to lead it, along with an incredible group of experts in disaster response and child protection who served as commissioners. The Commission created a detailed roadmap.

- **But, as of today, nearly 80% of the recommendations remain unfulfilled! Do we really want to wait for the next Katrina-type event to get back to this work?**

Now to be fair, much progress has been made. Child Care and School preparedness have come light years. Pediatric medical health saw Federal Legislation that included comprehensive requirements around Medical Countermeasures and a medical advisory committee. At FEMA, we saw Administrator Fugate make major efforts to integrate children's needs into every FEMA Regional Administrator's job and appoint a temporary Children's Needs Coordinator. But those steps are far from complete, and there's nothing to guarantee any focus on children's needs in the future. We need accountability. Our children deserve it.

The Report you have in your hands (**Still At Risk: U.S. Children 10 Years After Hurricane Katrina**) is the first effort to hold Government accountable for the recommendations of the National Commission. All levels of government have a role to play. Federal. State. Local. All federal Agencies. HHS. FEMA. Justice. ED. What you have in front of you is that effort. And today, we are happy to focus on FEMA.

As to the structure of the Report, you may recall that the National Commission's Final Report arranged their recommendations in 11 functional areas, 11 chapters.

81 Recommendations and sub-recommendations.

This report is our effort, through an objective, 3d party, outside research firm, to assess how many of those recommendations have been met (**GREEN**), how many are being addressed (**YELLOW**), and how many have not been met at all (**RED**).



The results are startling.

- **Nearly 80% of recommendations have not been met.**
- **That means 4 in 5 of the original Recommendations has not been met.**
- **In addition, we now know less than 1/10 of 1 percent of all Federal preparedness grants go to children's needs.**
- **Put another way, less than 1 cent in every \$10 spent on preparedness goes to children's safety.**

You may hear people say well, just addressing the recommendation is good enough. Some Agencies will say we cannot afford to single out children as a priority or for funding, due to all of the other priorities. We are here to say you must!! And we hope you will join us in that effort. Thankfully, Congressman Payne, you have been a stalwart champion in raising attention to these needs. So thank you for that! Most recently, your ability to pass HR 4509 will go a long way to connecting Emergency Management to Children's needs representatives at the state level.

As for what comes next, let's think back to Katrina, or to Sandy, or the Oklahoma Tornadoes for that matter, time and time again when we deploy, Save the Children is a witness to the fact that children are still more an afterthought than a priority. And not just in response – in planning too!

- **Let's not forget that Children are 25-50% of the population depending on the community.** This is no fringe group.
- **And furthermore, the experts remind us Children are NOT merely small adults –** consider how unique their needs are. Safety needs in shelters. Specialized supply needs in response efforts. Tailored medical needs in treatment. The list goes on!

Thankfully the commission took a comprehensive look at all of those needs, 11 functional areas, and made detailed recommendations in each.

Let's get to work to see that more of them are met!

Fortunately, we are also not alone. Your interest in heartening, and more importantly we are joined by organizations like the **American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)**, **Child Care Aware (CCA)**, and the **National Center of Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)** that spend each and every day trying to address these gaps!

In addition the **National Advisory Committee at FEMA**, the "NAC" made three key recommendations to FEMA, and the Administrator agreed! He agreed to try to get all three done. But now we have a new Administration and you will be meeting with a new Administrator. So we are asking for you to have him or her follow-through on those promises.

- **Let's take just one: the need for a permanent Children's Needs Technical Expert at FEMA.**



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Of course it is no one-size-fits-all solution, to all 11 chapters of recommendations to address the gaps in children's needs. But we have come here to today to suggest that we take that one big step.

We believe each of these gap areas, be it mental health, shelter standards, or preparedness, starts with Governmental Accountability. And having someone at the highest level of FEMA with the power to remind the Administrator and all departments of FEMA about the unique needs of children is vital.

While some Administrators including Mr. Fugate have had a stellar track-record at prioritizing Children's Needs, and in fact temporarily appointing a children's needs coordinator, that position is NOT required and could fade to obscurity.

That CANNOT and SHOULD NOT happen, so we are here today to ask you to join with us in addressing these gaps, and taking the first step, which is to make the Children's Needs Technical Expert at FEMA permanent.

Thank You.

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