



Written Statement for the Record

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**On behalf of the International Association of Emergency Managers and
the National Association of Counties**

**For the hearing: "Building a 21st Century Infrastructure for America: The National
Preparedness System"**

**Before the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure's
Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management
U.S. House of Representatives**

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Thank you, Chairman Barletta, Ranking Member Johnson and members of the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure's Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management for this opportunity to testify on America's Infrastructure and the National Preparedness System.

My name is Nick Crossley, and I am the Director of the Hamilton County, Ohio, Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency. I have been a Certified Emergency Manager for 15 years, and I appear before you today in my dual roles as First Vice President of the International Association of Emergency Managers and as a member of the National Association of Counties' Justice and Public Safety Policy Steering Committee.

About IAEM

The International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM), which has more than 6,000 members worldwide, is a non-profit educational organization dedicated to promoting the "Principles of Emergency Management" and representing those professionals whose goals are saving lives and protecting property and the environment during emergencies and disasters.

About NACo

NACo is the only national organization that represents county governments in the United States, including Alaska's boroughs and Louisiana's parishes. Founded in 1935, NACo assists America's 3,069 counties in pursuing excellence in public service to produce healthy, vibrant, safe and resilient communities.

Counties and the Local Role in Emergency Management

Counties are highly diverse, not only in my state of Ohio, but across the nation, and vary immensely in natural resources, social and political systems, cultural, economic and structural circumstances, and public health and environmental responsibilities. Counties range in area from 26 square miles (Arlington County, Virginia) to 87,860 square miles (North Slope Borough, Alaska). The population of counties varies from Loving County, Texas, with just under 100 residents, to Los Angeles County, California, which has a population that, at close to ten million people, exceeds that of most states. Overall, of our nation's 3,069 counties, approximately 50 percent have populations below 25,000. At the same time, there are more than 120 major urban counties, which collectively provide essential services to more than 130 million people each day. If you've seen one county, you've seen one county, and there are 3,068 more to go.

Counties also often serve as our nation's first line of defense before and after disasters strike. While state statutes and organizational structures vary, local emergency management responsibilities are most commonly vested in county governments. Following a disaster, local emergency managers are often first on the scene and play a key role in coordinating local emergency management efforts and working to mitigate damage from disasters. Other key county staff involved in pre- and post-disaster efforts include local police, sheriffs, firefighters, 911 call center staff, public health officials and public records and code inspectors. In the aftermath of disasters, we coordinate and help fund clean-up, recovery and rebuilding so that our residents can return to their lives as quickly as possible.

Furthermore, because counties are major owners of public infrastructure, we are also uniquely positioned to mitigate against disasters before they occur, so that their impact on our communities and residents' lives is decreased. Collectively, we own 45 percent of America's roads, nearly 40 percent of bridges, 960 hospitals, more than 2,500 jails, more than 650 nursing homes and a third of the nation's

airports. We also own and maintain a wide variety of public safety infrastructure, including roadside ditches, flood control channels, stormwater culverts and pipes, Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4), and other infrastructure used to funnel water away from low-lying roads, properties and businesses.

I come before you today as a representative of not just IAEM and NACo, but the entire profession of emergency management practitioners – the profession dedicated to protecting America’s local communities from natural and man-made disasters. As emergency managers, we strive daily to create and perfect systems of coordination and communication that save lives and minimize damage to property and infrastructure when our communities are struck by disaster.

Chairman Barletta, in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, Emergency Management Director Lucille Morgan spends most of her waking hours preparing for floods along the Susquehanna River – a recurring problem she has helped to manage multiple times during her 24-year career with the county’s emergency management agency.

Congressman Johnson, in DeKalb County, Emergency Management Director Sue Loeffler is tasked with preparing for disasters in a county that houses the busiest airport in the world and the headquarters of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Sue works daily not just to help ensure the safe transport of various bio-hazards, including the Ebola virus, to and from CDC headquarters, but also to prepare the community’s response to accidental introduction of these lethal bio-hazards into the community.

90 minutes south of DeKalb, the Troup County, Georgia emergency manager faces an annual tornado season, and the Chattahoochee River occasionally floods Congressman Ferguson’s hometown of West Point. Emergency managers in Los Angeles County plan for the inevitable earthquakes that are a constant threat to Congresswoman Napolitano’s constituents who live near the San Andreas Fault.

Chairman Barletta and members of the subcommittee, local emergency management agencies are at the center of our nation’s preparation for, response to and recovery from disasters both large and small. We are committed to creating a culture of preparedness that builds and sustains a disaster-resistant and resilient America.

The Local Perspective on the National Preparedness System

While local emergency managers’ mission of protecting America’s communities from disaster is carried out at the local level and largely with local and state resources, we are grateful to be a part of today’s conversation because we know that our efforts are more impactful, and our communities more resilient, with the support and partnership of the federal government. The National Preparedness System, and specifically the Emergency Management Performance Grant program, or EPMG, have over the last decade become pivotal pillars of support for efficient and effective emergency management at the local level.

Through EPMG, the federal government supports the development, evaluation, implementation and administration of local Emergency Operations Plans in a manner that best suits the needs of each community and its unique set of disaster threats. But the grant program does not only help us protect our *own* communities – it enables local emergency management agencies to support and assist each other when disasters strain our individual capacities. EPMG also helps states coordinate this support and assistance among counties, both within and across state lines, ultimately creating a national emergency management structure that helps to save lives and lessen the physical and financial impact of disasters.

Over the last decade, this structure of support and assistance has strengthened our nation's response to some of the most destructive disasters that have devastated our communities, in a documented and measurable manner. To cite just one example, after Superstorm Sandy struck in 2012, Ramsey County, Minnesota sent emergency management practitioners trained under EMPG to New York to reinforce the efforts of overwhelmed state and local emergency management agencies. Without EMPG, this sort of interstate coordination and assistance simply would not have happened, and the short and long-term impact of the storm on our nation would have been even greater.

The Impact of Potential Cuts to Emergency Management Grants

Ramsey County's assistance to state and local emergency management agencies during Superstorm Sandy is the Emergency Management Performance Grant in action – increasing our nation's resiliency to disaster by fostering a structure of emergency management support and assistance that crosses local and state lines. A weakened EMPG program would make this structure weaker and less sustainable. This would not only result in greater damage to life, property and infrastructure when disasters strike, but would also substantially increase the need for post-disaster aid from the federal government. Because of this, cuts to EMPG are shortsighted from a budgetary standpoint and counterproductive to the goals of the National Preparedness System.

Furthermore, as budgetary and policy priorities are reorganized under a new presidential administration, it is imperative that we closely assess the potential impact of these changes on local emergency management agencies, so that our pivotal role in keeping America's communities safe is not made more difficult. As outlined above, EMPG and other federal grant programs that local governments utilize to strengthen our ongoing efforts to protect communities improve the nation's resiliency to disaster in a systemic, documented and measurable manner. Weakening these programs will make America more vulnerable to natural and man-made disasters, regardless of how the savings achieved in this manner are reinvested.

Similarly, potential withholding of federal funds from local emergency management agencies that are deemed to be a part of "sanctuary jurisdictions" would diminish our nation's public safety and exacerbate an already difficult situation faced by counties across the country, regardless of their demographics or political leaning. Federal courts have repeatedly ruled that counties risk violating the Fourth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution when they honor federal immigration detainers that do not clearly demonstrate probable cause. If the federal executive or legislative branches impose penalties on counties who do not honor detainers without probable cause, counties are effectively receiving contradictory messages from different branches of the federal government. Depending on which message we conform to, we are either inviting lengthy and costly lawsuits, or risking the loss of critical federal support. Forcing counties into this difficult position is certainly unfair, and potentially unconstitutional.

Conclusion

The National Preparedness System and the Emergency Management Performance Grant program have proven to be invaluable pillars of support for local and state emergency management practitioners who are entrusted with the sacred responsibility of preserving the health and safety of America's local communities in the face of disasters both natural and man-made. Congress should, and must, continue to fully fund the program. Thank you, Chairman Barletta, Ranking Member Johnson and members of the subcommittee for the opportunity to testify before you today.