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STATEMENT BY

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VICE PRESIDENT, THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF MAYORS**

**ON
ENSURING THE TRANSPARENCY, EFFICIENCY, AND EFFECTIVENESS OF
HOMELAND SECURITY GRANTS.**

**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS, RESPONSE AND
COMMUNICATIONS
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

MARCH 20, 2012

Chairman Bilirakis, Ranking Member Richardson, and - I have to acknowledge Congressman Meehan, who is our good neighbor –members of the Committee, I am Michael A. Nutter, Mayor of Philadelphia and Vice President of The United States Conference of Mayors. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you on FEMA’s proposal to change the Homeland Security grant programs. My basic message is that mayors and other local officials across the nation have serious concerns about this proposal.

We strongly support the existing menu of homeland security programs and, although we recognize that they may not be perfect, they are the product of years of work by Congress, the Administration, state and local governments, and first responders. Frankly we cannot understand why FEMA proposes to throw away that work in such a wholesale fashion and to do it through the appropriations process, rather than the authorization process.

Everyone agrees that we should spend our homeland security dollars where they are needed most in as efficient and effective manner as possible.

Everyone understands that unspent funds remain in the pipeline and that everyone needs to do a better job of getting these out the door.

Everyone shares the goals of basing funding decisions on threat assessments and reducing administrative burdens.

Everyone agrees that we need to improve cooperation and communication among the various agencies and governments involved in making our homeland secure.

What we don’t understand is why anyone believes that this radical and rapid change is needed in order to achieve those goals.

FEMA’s proposal would convert the current Homeland Security grant programs into a state-administered block grant program and a state-centric competitive grant programs in which funding decisions are based on state and multi-state threat assessments. There would be no more separate UASI program; there would be no more separate transit or port security programs. These are programs which provide funding to areas and facilities considered to be at greatest risk.

The outline for the proposed National Preparedness Grant Program (NPGP) raises serious concerns and questions for those of us at the local level – and we are the ones charged with trying to prevent incidents from occurring in the first place and providing that critical first response when they do occur. Among our concerns and questions are the following:

- The NPGP proposal moves away from the current regional governance, assessment and strategy-based approach to a competitive and individual project-based approach that will pit cities, counties and states against each other for funding. This will generate conflict instead of fostering collaboration as is currently the case.
- The NPGP proposal emphasizes nationally deployable assets, thus shifting the emphasis from the full system of prevention, protection, preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation to one that appears to focus on response alone.
- What role will local government officials, local emergency managers, and first responders have in the Threat Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA) process so that we can ensure that it includes local concerns? It's important to note that THIRAs are not homeland security plans. They are risk assessments that should be used to help develop plans along with capabilities assessments and gap and sustainment analyses.
- It is unclear how the funding in the NPGP will be distributed to local areas; so how do we ensure that it is used to meet local threats and preparedness gaps? How do we ensure, for example, that political considerations do not become the criterion for the distribution of these funds?
- The UASI program ensures that federal funding is used to improve preparedness in high-risk areas, as recommended by the 9/11 Commission. How can FEMA ensure that the new NPGP meets this recommendation, if it distributes funding solely based on THIRA examinations performed by states?

- Why are such major changes being proposed without advance consultation with the local governments and first responders charged with preventing and responding to incidents? Why are they being proposed without consulting in advance with the committees of jurisdiction in Congress which have worked so hard over the years to craft the current suite of homeland security and preparedness programs? And why are they being proposed to be accomplished through the appropriations rather than the authorization process?

The Philadelphia Region

Let me discuss my own region. Homeland security funds are distributed to Philadelphia on a regional basis. Over the last 10 years, we have worked with the four surrounding counties – including those represented by Congressman Meehan – to develop strong homeland security capabilities, such as specialized law enforcement response teams, urban search and rescue capabilities, and enhanced medical response teams. More specifically, the City’s response to Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee was aided tremendously by numerous resources acquired using UASI funding. For example, UASI funds allowed us to utilize enhanced technology utilized in the City’s Emergency Operations Center, the City’s Emergency Public Notification System, emergency communications equipment used by first responders, cots and animal supplies used at emergency shelters, variable message board signs used to direct citizens out of hazardous areas, and the salaries of full time emergency managers responsible for developing the plans that were implemented during the storms.

At current FY12 funding levels, the Southeastern Pennsylvania region has just enough funding to sustain the prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery capabilities it has worked so hard to develop over the past 10 years. A further reduction in funding would not only prohibit us from expanding upon those capabilities, but would also require the region to reduce those capabilities through the elimination of critical programs. FEMA’s proposal provides no assurance that we would continue to receive these funds which are so critical to our region’s security and to our ability to prevent and respond to, mitigate, and recover from any incidents which do occur.

We are very concerned about the increased role which states will play in determining where and how funds would be spent:

- With increased authority, the Commonwealth will likely augment the already bureaucratic processes required to purchase equipment. Even now, prior to increased oversight and authority, the Commonwealth has added additional layers to the equipment acquisition process thus limiting the ability of local jurisdictions to spend down their grant funds and obtain much needed equipment.
- Further, the Commonwealth already has a track record of re-distributing funding away from urban areas and re-allocating that funding to other areas of the Commonwealth. For example, in FY2011, PEMA reallocated the State Homeland Security Grant Program (SHSGP) funding away from the Philadelphia Urban Area to other Task Forces within the Commonwealth. The SHSGP distribution is historically based on population index, economic index, and critical infrastructure points. Based on this formula alone, the Philadelphia Urban Area was slated to receive the largest award amount. While we were bracing for a 50 percent cut due to an overall decrease in funding, we actually received an 85.46 percent reduction in the SHSGP grant. There are nine Task Forces in the Commonwealth. One received a 50 percent SHSGP cut and the others received 25 percent reductions. This demonstrates a disproportionate impact on Philadelphia that does not align with the historical grant allocation guidelines.

As a result of the proposed changes, possible specific cuts **could** include these items:

- Elimination of essential full time emergency management planning positions. UASI funds currently subsidize the salaries of over 50 percent of the Philadelphia Office of Emergency Management staff (14) as well as the salaries of numerous regional emergency planners. A reduction in funding could leave the City and region without the professionals required to develop and maintain comprehensive contingency plans that address the consequences of terrorism, natural disasters, and man-made events.
- Downsizing or eliminating the Southeastern Communications Network (SECOM), a four-state, 12-county dedicated, secure microwave system that provides connectivity between Delaware Valley 9-1-1 Operations Centers and Emergency Operations Centers and provides voice radio connectivity for emergency responders in over 300 jurisdictions.

- Significant cuts in training, exercises, equipment and resources currently directed to specialized operations teams including Special Weapons and Tactics Teams (SWAT), Regional Bomb Squads, Major Incident Response Teams, Terrorism Response Teams, Urban Search & Rescue, Swift Water Rescue, and a variety of other teams that protect the citizens of the Southeast Region.
- Elimination of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Surge Medical Assistance Response Team (SMRT) – a skilled group of volunteers organized to provide medical surge capacity to meet regional needs generated by an emergency. SEPA SMART responds to community needs caused by natural or human-caused disasters by augmenting existing health care staff and/or deploying a temporary hospital unit. They deploy to increase the surge capacity of a hospital facility, a community-based alternate care site or a disaster site.
- Reduced information sharing capabilities at the recently opened Delaware Valley Intelligence Center (DVIC), the 72nd federally certified fusion center in the country, serving a four-state, 12-county customer base and designed truly to be an all-hazards, all-crime fusion center.
- A significant reduction in training available to first responders, government employees, volunteers, critical infrastructure stakeholders and others who play a critical role in prevention, preparedness, and response.
- Inability to replace first responder materials, equipment, vehicles, supplies, and medications at the end of their useful life, including radios, tactical equipment, personal protective equipment, detection equipment, pharmaceutical stockpiles, etc.
- Elimination of the Law Enforcement Justice Information System (LEJIS) which connects existing local police Records Management Systems (RMS) together in real-time so incident data can be shared throughout Pennsylvania. LEJIS saves lives and protects property by giving officers in the field real-time access to incident data from surrounding police

departments; LEJIS currently connects nearly 250 police departments throughout Pennsylvania, including the City of Philadelphia Police Department.

- A reduction in the region's capacity to provide mass care and sheltering to those directly impacted by disasters.

Let me share with you the value of the funding we have received in human terms: I have two photos of a tactical helmet and vest, each worn by separate Philadelphia Police Department SWAT officers during a standoff last year. Each officer was shot (one in the torso, the other in the temple), and the protective equipment purchased using UASI funds literally saved their lives.

Principles for Program Improvement

The Conference of Mayors is working closely with other national organizations representing local governments, local emergency managers, and first responders on ways to improve the suite of homeland grant programs. We offer you some principles on which we all agree, and which may be helpful to the Committee:

- **Transparency** – The methodology needs to be clear – that is, how the states are distributing funds, why they are making these decisions, and where the funds are going must be transparent and understandable.
- **Local Involvement** – Local government officials, including emergency managers and emergency response officials, know best the threats and vulnerabilities in their areas. The THIRA process must include the input of local elected and emergency response officials, and FEMA must be able to audit states by comparing local risk assessments to the state level THIRA.
- **Flexibility with Accountability** – Any changes to the existing federal grant programs should allow federal funding to meet individual local needs and fill preparedness gaps identified at the local level. Effective but sometimes less politically popular programs, like mitigation, must still receive funding.

Local Funding – Since event impact and response are primarily local in nature, grant funding should support primarily local prevention and preparedness efforts, as is the case under the current program structure. . It is important that federal homeland security grants continue to fund local prevention and response activities, including local emergency managers and first responders, and activities that support their preparedness efforts.

- **Terrorism Prevention** - We must not lose the current emphasis on supporting law enforcement’s terrorist prevention activities. The federal grant funds should not be used to support larger state bureaucracies in place of counter terrorism preparedness.
- **Incentives for Regionalization** – FEMA’s proposal focuses on states and multi-state regions, similar to the FEMA regions. It is important to make sure that the homeland security grants also support preparedness in metropolitan intra-state and inter-state regions.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today on this issue of vital importance to me and my city and to all local officials, emergency managers, and first responders across the nation. Mayors and local officials look forward to working with you to ensure the transparency, efficiency, and effectiveness of homeland security grants.