



**Ensuring the Efficiency, Effectiveness, and
Transparency of Homeland Security Grants
(Part II):
Stakeholder Perspectives**

Written Statement of

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presented to the

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Good afternoon, Chairman Bilirakis, Ranking Member Richardson, and members of the subcommittee. I am Chief Hank C. Clemmensen, of the Palatine Rural Fire Protection District located in Inverness, Illinois, and the 1st Vice President of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC). The International Association of Fire Chiefs represents the leadership of the nation's fire, rescue, and emergency medical services (EMS), including rural volunteer fire departments, suburban combination departments, and metropolitan career departments. I thank the committee today for the opportunity to represent the views of local firefighters and EMS responders in the discussion about the grant programs at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

The Effectiveness of Homeland Security Grants

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 revealed major weaknesses in the nation's prevention, preparedness and response system. Many of these weaknesses were confirmed by the catastrophic nature of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. In both cases, local fire, police and EMS departments were the first on scene at the event. To reinforce them, the nation mobilized local resources from other states. Congress realized that an effective national response system depended on having local first responders adequately trained and equipped to respond to all hazards. Through the passage of legislation, Congress authorized grant programs at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to help the nation's fire, law enforcement, and EMS personnel prepare for any future threat, either natural or man-made.

Over the past 10 years, the DHS has provided over \$35 billion in federal grant funds to help state, territorial, tribal and local governments improve their planning, mitigation, preparedness, prevention, response, and recovery capabilities. On behalf of the nation's fire chiefs, I would like to assure the subcommittee that these efforts have improved the nation's emergency response capabilities.

Consider the following examples:

- In Illinois, funding from the State Homeland Security Program (SHSP) has helped Illinois strengthen its Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS), one of the nation's premier mutual aid systems. The system is composed of over 1,100 fire agencies and can mobilize approximately 38,000 firefighters and paramedics to respond to an event in the state of Illinois. Approximately 800 times per year, the MABAS is activated to help jurisdictions respond in their areas. In addition, the MABAS has been used to deploy resources to interstate disasters, such as Hurricanes Katrina, Gustav, and Ike and last year's river flooding in Missouri and Illinois.
- Because of the support of the DHS grant programs, there are now 300 state and local teams with technical rescue capability. After the April 2011 deadly tornadoes, Alabama was able to rely on state and local resources for search and rescue operations, instead of requesting federal urban search and rescue support.

- In Arizona, the Tucson area has received funding from the Metropolitan Medical Response System (MMRS) since 1999. This funding paid for planning, equipment and training to help first responders, public health, private health, law enforcement, and emergency managers across Southern Arizona prepare for a mass-casualty event. The training, equipment and exercises funded by the MMRS program played a major role in the effective interdisciplinary response to the January 8, 2011 shooting of Representative Gabrielle Giffords and 19 others.

The great success of the federal homeland security grant programs is that they provide an incentive for federal, tribal, state, territorial and local jurisdictions to work together. By planning, training, and conducting exercises together, local fire chiefs, police chiefs, sheriffs, public health officials, emergency managers, and state and federal officials are able and ready to work together when an incident happens. This pre-planning and coordination prevents confusion, and directly saves lives.

The nation's fire service realizes that spending cuts will be required to reduce the federal deficit. Already we have seen the virtual elimination of the MMRS and Interoperable Emergency Communications Grant programs. While there is a temptation to cut the grants to state and local programs, we ask that Congress fully consider the effects of these cuts. In many cases, state and local jurisdictions do not have the funding to make up for cuts to these federal programs. For example, the elimination of the MMRS program means that Tucson will no longer have a full-time MMRS coordinator, which will directly reduce the region's ability to respond to a future mass-casualty event. Cuts to the State Homeland Security Grant Program will affect Illinois' ability to respond to tornadoes and flooding, and prepare for future events such as the May 2012 NATO summit. As Congress considers the future of the homeland security grant programs, there should be a focus on sustaining the nation's emergency response capabilities.

The National Preparedness Grant Program Proposal

As part of its Fiscal Year 2013 budget proposal, the Administration proposes consolidating the 16 homeland security grant programs into one program: the National Preparedness Grant Program (NPGP). The IAFC understands the Administration's interest in ensuring that homeland security grants are distributed in an efficient and effective manner, and that taxpayer funds are used responsibly. Like many stakeholders that represent local governments and first responders, we were not consulted about this proposal before it was released as part of the FY 2013 budget request. While we have received an overview of the program, it is clear that the DHS must still develop many details for the program, including how it will affect the Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) grants that assist many metropolitan fire departments.

Based on the information we have, it is hard for me to provide a detailed analysis of the NPGP proposal. However, I would like to recommend a few principles for the committee's consideration as it reviews the Administration's proposal:

- 1) **A reformed DHS grant program must sustain existing emergency response capabilities.** America's taxpayers have spent over \$35 billion to improve the nation's ability to respond to any future terrorist attack, hurricane, tornado or other event. This funding has created a robust national preparedness system that is based on the capability to mobilize local first responders and deploy them to an affected area. Any reforms to the DHS grants programs should put a priority on sustaining this system.
- 2) **A reformed DHS grant program should support the principles of regionalization and mutual aid between states, regions, and localities.** Many jurisdictions around the nation do not have the resources to singlehandedly respond to a major catastrophe. For many years, fire and EMS departments have used mutual aid agreements to address this problem. By working together, fire departments can pool resources and protect their communities. In addition, the planning required for mutual aid agreements promotes coordination between jurisdictions and a wiser allocation of taxpayer-funded resources. In partnership with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the IAFC has reached out to all 50 states and the U.S. territories to develop statewide mutual aid systems that are similar to the MABAS in Illinois. Twenty-four states have completed the process and are capable of deploying without assistance. In addition, eighteen states are capable of deploying with assistance and are in the process of working to be deployable without assistance. We are encouraged by the focus on mutual aid discussed in the NPGP. However, DHS also must recognize that regional planning can take place at all levels: between local jurisdictions; between areas within a state; between two or three states; or at the level of a FEMA region.
- 3) **A reformed DHS grant program must engage local stakeholders.** As fire chief of my community, I know that I can work with my counterparts in law enforcement, emergency management, and public health to determine the capabilities, risks, and vulnerabilities in my jurisdiction. The DHS' newly announced Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA) process will help us with this task. However, I am concerned that the local THIRA that we complete will not be included in the state THIRA, which is required by December 31, 2012. We are concerned that state officials are not as informed about local threats, risks, capabilities, and vulnerabilities as the local officials that have the duty of protecting their communities. The DHS must clarify that state officials must include the information from local THIRAs in their submission. In addition, localities must have the ability to challenge a state THIRA, if it does not reflect the local communities' capabilities, vulnerabilities and gaps accurately.
- 4) **A reformed DHS grant program must allow flexibility with accountability.** Because local jurisdictions are aware of the gaps in their preparedness system, they should be allowed to allocate grant funds to fill these gaps. Some

jurisdictions may need to use grants to mitigate flood or wildland fire hazards. Other localities may need to prepare for a mass-casualty event, or enhance their terrorism prevention or information-sharing capabilities. However, public funds are scarce in this budgetary environment and should be used wisely. Greater multidisciplinary and regional planning, as both the UASI and MMRS programs encourage, will ensure a more accountable use of federal grant funds.

- 5) **A reformed DHS grant program must protect local funding.** Local jurisdictions will be the first on-scene and expect to have to wait 72 hours for federal assistance. So, they must have the necessary staffing, equipment, planning and training to respond to any threat in their area for at least this time period. We are concerned that the DHS has not made it clear that at least 80 percent of the NPGP funds will be allocated to local communities, including law enforcement, fire and EMS, and emergency management. The American taxpayers' funds should be spent protecting their communities, not promoting larger state bureaucracies.

- 6) **A reformed DHS grant program should increase transparency.** Because the NPGP proposal seems to give a larger authority to the State Administrative Agencies, there must be a transparent and credible process for allocating funds. In order to ensure effective use of the DHS grants, Congress, the Administration, and the American taxpayer must be able to see how, where, and why these grants are being spent. In addition, the DHS should provide more detail about how the competitive portion of the NPGP will work, who is eligible for it, and what criteria will be used for allocating the federal grants.

- 7) **A reformed DHS grant program must continue to support terrorism prevention.** Currently, the DHS grants support intelligence fusion centers; information-sharing between federal, state and local officials; and increased law enforcement activities to prevent and deter terrorists. Any changes to the current DHS grant programs must continue to support these vital activities.

The IAFC believes that these principles serve as fair guidelines with which to evaluate the NPGP or any future grant reform proposal. The current DHS suite of grants, including the SHSP, the UASI, and the MMRS, are authorized in existing legislation, including the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 (P.L. 110-53) and the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 (P.L. 109-295). As the authorizing committee that wrote these laws, we believe that the House Homeland Security Committee should be an active participant in any reform effort. The IAFC would like to be a constructive participant in this process.

Conclusion

The current NPGP proposal does not provide enough detail, and it is hard to determine how it would measure up against the principles that I have described. Because the House and Senate Appropriations Committees are moving quickly this year to pass the FY 2013 appropriations bills, we urge Congress to delay consideration of the NPGP proposal for a year. Instead, Congress should instruct the DHS to work with the state and local stakeholders, including fire, EMS, law enforcement, and other first responders, to develop a detailed plan for reforming the homeland security grant programs. In addition, we would recommend that Congress clearly appropriate specific funding levels for each of these programs, including the SHSP, the UASI, and the MMRS, in the FY 2013 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act to ensure that each program is adequately funded.

On behalf of the leadership of America's fire and EMS departments, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing. The IAFC is committed to making sure that America's first responders have the equipment, staffing and training that they need to protect their communities. We look forward to working with Congress, the Administration and other state and local stakeholders to develop an accountable and effective grant program to meet this requirement. I look forward to answering any questions that you may have.