

Testimony By

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On

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

Before The

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Chairman Bilirakis, Ranking Member Richardson, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, I am Hui-Shan Lin Walker, the Emergency Management Coordinator for Hampton, Virginia. I have been a local government emergency manager for 12 years and before that worked for five years in a local chapter’s American Red Cross Disaster Services as an Assistant Director and Director. I have also served as President of the Virginia Emergency Management Association. Currently, I serve as the President of the U.S. Council of the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM-USA)

I appreciate this opportunity to testify before you on behalf of IAEM-USA. IAEM 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 section. 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.

Efforts to secure the homeland for all hazards including terrorism must be collaborative. However, the proposed National Preparedness Grant Program (NPGP) was developed and presented as part of the FY 2012 budget without consulting with Congressional authorization Committees or inclusion of key local stakeholders—local elected officials, first responders and emergency managers. The budget proposal for the NPGP is a vision with very few details.

On March 30th, FEMA provided a two page fact sheet about the program, then on April 16th held a stakeholders forum to have dialogue about the NPGP. Although we appreciated the opportunity to participate in the forum where additional information was shared, we consider it a beginning

not an end of a collaborative effort with stakeholders to assess the programs, answer the multitude of outstanding process questions and help develop improvements.

At the local level, there is agreement that homeland security dollars should be spent where they are most needed in a transparent, efficient and effective manner. These grant programs were established and have been administered under the principle of a collaborative balance between federal, state and local discretion in how the funding would be used to address preparedness issues. This balanced “whole community” system allows local leaders to determine the best way to provide emergency services to their citizens. Local steering groups comprised of multi-disciplinary, multi-jurisdictional leaders were able to determine the best way to provide vital emergency services to their citizens. Therefore, we have serious concerns about the FEMA FY 13 budget proposal to collapse 16 homeland security grant programs into a state centric block and competitive grant program. This proposed consolidation will impact the greatest part of the “whole community”, the local community, as it will be severely challenged to maintain and sustain their current response capabilities.

The primary reason for this concern is that each one of the current grant programs was initiated and funded by Congress to address a specific need. The blending of grant money into a single program would cause the eventual lack of identity and those specific needs may go unaddressed. There are advantages to having multiple grant programs which serve different purposes. Some programs are essential but have lower profiles and may not compete well in a consolidated grant program. There is no question that with diminishing federal grant funding that the current homeland security grant programs should be reassessed to ensure that what funds are available continue to support the capabilities and to develop capacities that are critical to our nation. There has not been enough specificity in the proposed vision to address how the consolidation process would work and the impacts to the current grant programs as they are today.

Examples of Capabilities Built

At this time I would like to share examples of some capabilities that have been built efficiently and effectively over the past decade with homeland security funds that have had different recipients with varying requirements to address specific needs. As a local emergency manager from Hampton, VA, I am part of the Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News, VA-NC Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) which is the fourth largest metropolitan area in the southeastern United States, and the largest between Washington, D.C. and Atlanta. The 2000 Census estimated that 1.6 million residents live in Hampton Roads and ranked the region as the 31st largest MSA in the country. Furthermore unlike many of the metropolitan areas across the country, Hampton Roads’ population is not centered in one city, but spread broadly throughout the region.

First, the Metropolitan Medical Response System (MMRS) funding was made available to 124 jurisdictions in 43 states to build local capacity for mass casualty events. It has been considered by many locals to be the cornerstone of their medical and responder team building across multiple agencies and disciplines. It was a small program which has great value but was cut in the FY 12 budget. MMRS funding was direct to local jurisdictions to build the capacity they

needed for manmade and natural disasters; particularly to build the capacity they needed in the critical 24-48 hours. The program guidance required a steering committee of multi-disciplinary, multi-jurisdictional leaders that were tasked to assess the specific medical response needs of the community. It was considered easier to use than some funds; the decision-making was at the local level and was flexible and adaptable to meet the local needs.

On April 6th, a Navy F/A-18D jet crashed into an apartment complex in Virginia Beach, VA. The first responders and emergency managers in the region had been training for years with the military for such an event and the results were seen in the efficient and effective response. This incident could have been much worse and had casualties other than the seven injured. In the event of a significant mass casualty, Hampton Roads has a 470-member (207 member on call group) Hampton Roads Metropolitan Medical Strike Team (HRMMST) that provides on-scene expertise and resources to the Incident Commander during a disaster. They were on standby during this incident. The HRMMST is a chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosives (CBRNE) trained medical emergency response team that maintains a redundant response capability of personnel, trucks, trailers, equipment, supplies, and communications. This capability was built and funded with MMRS grant funds.

Hampton Roads was designated an Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) region from 2007-2011. The funding for UASI programs also allowed for capabilities such as utilization of radio caches and WebEOC for situational awareness and communication between the military, local first responders and local and state emergency managers during the recent jet crash incident. Military communities have been mentioned as the most at-risk for terrorism by Secretary Napolitano and in a special report by Congressman Peter King. Hampton Roads has the largest Naval base in the world and has facilities housing all the branches of the armed services. As was seen during this recent incident, the military relies on the abilities of the local first responders. Unfortunately, the Hampton Roads region was eliminated from the FY12 UASI funding despite its large military community and vulnerability to hurricanes.

Another example of the effectiveness of the MMRS program can be seen in the response to the swarm of devastating tornadoes that hit Alabama and killed 241 people April 27th last year. Huntsville/Madison County, Alabama used MMRS funds to develop plans and build medical response capability in fourteen counties. Responders and medical teams trained as part of MMRS and the equipment and supplies which were purchased were deployed and used in the impacted areas including the most rural counties. Rough terrain vehicles which had been equipped with stretchers were used to bring victims from the debris fields to waiting ambulances. Each county has a cache of trauma and triage equipment that was used during the response. Patients were efficiently triaged and transported saving many lives.

Second, the Hampton Roads UASI has promoted regional collaboration through its governance structure. The HR Urban Area Working Group (UAWG) has representation from the various disciplines involved in homeland security including the Port Authority and Transit agencies along with representatives from critical infrastructures such as water utilities. The decisions for funding and implementation of projects have been made jointly to ensure that the region addresses its threats and gaps that have been identified through gap analyses conducted over the last couple of years. As a region through our collaboration, we have been able to leverage

various homeland security grant programs with different recipients and requirements to fill gaps. An example is that UASI funds were used to train and equip 75 members of an All Hazards Incident Management Team (AHIMT) and Port Security funds were utilized to fund the mobile command unit to support the AHIMT. This resource is a deployable regional asset that through collaboration was funded even as grant funds were diminishing because as a region it was identified as a gap that needed to be filled. The proposed FEMA NPGP would negatively affect this regional collaboration by not leveraging the current effective governance structure established by UASI. Instead the new approach would authorize a competitive grant program that could pit homeland security partners against one another. There are many more examples of how homeland security funds have been used to address gaps in our local capabilities across the nation to better respond to manmade and natural hazards, but I just wanted to highlight a few where a difference was made to our local communities.

Concerns and Unanswered Questions on NPGP Proposal

There are still many unanswered questions and concerns regarding the NPGP that need to be addressed. A few that I would like to highlight are as follows:

- A significant change is that projects must be based on capability gaps identified by in a Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA). The State-centric approach does not clearly explain how local government officials, local emergency managers, and first responders will participate effectively and efficiently in the THIRA process in order to address capability gaps at the local level. The local assessment of capability gaps is based on the needs of real responders who are best suited to make those decisions. In addition, there has been a lot of homeland security funds already dedicated to performing gap analyses for local regions over the past decade to assist in prioritizing where funds were dedicated to guide investments. How are those assessments that focused on Target Capabilities and Core Capabilities going to transition to the THIRA?
- Furthermore, with the competitive funding pool also based on the regional THIRAs at the federal level, how do state and locals address their capability gaps in the event that their THIRA identifies conflicting priority gaps? Which THIRA will take precedence for funding and/or what is the process to resolve the differences?
- The current law requires that 80% of the State Homeland Security Grant program funds support local identified gaps in capabilities. How will this be ensured through the wholesale consolidation of the current 16 separate homeland security grant programs into one which seems to ignore the requirements of the 9\11 Act? Local stakeholder input is vitally important to ensure that identified gaps at the local level continue to be met in a strategic and targeted methodology that ensures continuity of past efforts.
- Will the funding support building all hazards capabilities? Again, there is no clear guidance, just a vision without local stakeholder input. The NPGP emphasizes nationally deployable assets, which seems to focus just on response alone, but there is an emergency management system that includes prevention, protection, preparedness, recovery and mitigation with gaps that also need to be addressed. We should not forget the lessons of Hurricane Katrina.

- How will the process work for the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI)? We understand that a selected number of UASI jurisdictions would receive a designated amount of funding from FEMA through the SAA as is current practice. The UASI would prepare an investment justification (IJ) and provide it to FEMA through the SAA as is current practice. However, under the NPGP would the UASI be able to spend the funding on the needs it had designated as most critical and which met FEMA requirements and guidance through previous risk assessments and gap analyses or would the funding be reallocated at the state level to identified priorities in the state THIRA?

Principles for Program Improvement

In response to the proposed NPGP, twelve national organizations of locals including elected officials, first responders, and emergency managers have developed a set of core principles to guide grant program reform – principles which we would urge you to consider as you evaluate reform proposals.

- **Increased Transparency** – It must be clear and understandable to the federal government and the public how the states are distributing funds, why they are making these decisions, and where the funds are going.
- **Greater 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. Further, local governments should have the opportunity to challenge a state THIRA that inadequately reflects their needs or input.
- **Flexibility with Accountability** – Any changes to the existing federal grant programs should allow federal funding to meet individual local needs, and preparedness gaps as identified at the local level. Effective but sometimes less politically popular programs, like mitigation, must still receive funding.
- **Protect 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 the vast majority of 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.
- **Sustain Terrorism Prevention** - The current emphasis on supporting law enforcement's terrorism prevention activities must be maintained. The federal grant funds should not be used to support larger state bureaucracies at the expense of operational counter terrorism preparedness, threat analysis, and information sharing activities.

- Incentives for Innate Regionalization – FEMA’s proposal focuses on states and multi-state regions (similar to the FEMA regions). The homeland security grants must also support preparedness in metropolitan intra-state and inter-state regions.

The Path Forward

The details matter and there are still too many unanswered questions on how the NPGP would actually work. A policy shift toward developing only those capabilities applicable to a national level event will greatly diminish the ability of local first responders to provide emergency services during the first critical hours or days of such an event.

We recommend that the dialogue continue with DHS/FEMA, the Congress and all relevant state and local stakeholders. On April 24th, a letter was sent by twelve National organizations of locals to Secretary Napolitano and Administrator Fugate suggesting that the Department not rush to make major changes this year, but let the changes being implemented in the FY 2012 budget play out and be evaluated. This would give time for the Department to work with key local and state stakeholders in a collaborative way to develop reforms which incorporate the successful elements of the homeland security programs and identify changes which need to be made. We have attached this letter and would appreciate it being part of the hearing record.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify on this important topic and would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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