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AMERICAN RED CROSS**

**Before the Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response and Communications
*United States House of Representatives***

Chairman Bilirakis and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, I am honored to appear today on behalf of the American Red Cross. My name is Linda Carbone and I serve as the Chief Executive Officer of the Tampa Bay Chapter and Florida's West Coast Region of the American Red Cross.

For more than 130 years, our nation has relied on the American Red Cross in emergency situations. The Red Cross provides shelter, food, clothing, emotional and other support to those impacted by disasters in communities across the country and around the world. We supply nearly half of the nation's blood. We teach lifesaving skills to hundreds of thousands of people each year, and we support and provide invaluable resources to the members of the military and their families. Whether it is a hurricane or a heart attack, a call for blood or a call for help, the Red Cross is there when America needs us.

The issue we are discussing today, "Weathering the Storm: A State and Local Perspective on Emergency Management," is very important to the American Red Cross and particularly important to me and my colleagues serving in the state of Florida. As we mark the beginning of the 2011 Hurricane season last week, we especially appreciate your attention to this subject and are grateful to those colleagues and partners working together to help prepare Florida for this hurricane season.

Allow me to begin by saying this: The American Red Cross stands ready to respond to the 2011 hurricane season. We have reviewed and studied what we did well in the recent seasons, addressed any challenges, and improved upon our successes. Although we've been fortunate to avoid the impact of a tropical system on our soil in the past few years, we've gained valuable experience for our paid and volunteer staff by deploying them to disasters around the country, most especially the recent spring storms across much of the southeast. We have also taken a hard look at those areas where we must continue to improve our response and we've identified and addressed shortcomings. From a Florida tropics perspective, Tropical Storm Fay affected the majority of Florida counties in the 2008 hurricane season. Over 1400 Red Crossers came to the aid of affected Floridians and the vast majority of those volunteers came from our Florida Red Cross Chapters. We opened 118 shelters with 21, 224 overnight stays and 372,919 meals and snacks.

The American people can continue to rely upon the Red Cross to deliver our promise of neighbor helping neighbor. Our legendary corps of volunteers is well trained and ready to help America. We are working closer than ever with our colleagues in the nonprofit, charitable and faith-based communities to bring the message of preparedness to our communities and partner to coordinate the best response in times of emergency. We continue to improve our coordination with Federal, state and local officials. Here in Florida, the partnership with State and County Emergency Management is very strong. From responding to single family fires to a major hurricane response, we keep our Emergency Management Partners informed and work along side of them to serve disaster survivors.

We have been participating with our Federal, State, Community and faith-based partners in statewide and risk area planning. Red Cross representatives at all levels have been involved in planning with concentration on mass care, sheltering and feeding, as well as family notification and reunification, post disaster relocation, repatriation, update of the CEMP (Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan), case management and evacuation workgroups.

I am very pleased to share with you today our perspective on emergency management, our plans for the coming season and our rejuvenated sense of urgency as we address our goals. The next disaster may occur with little or no warning, as we have seen too often these past few months with the terrible tornadoes throughout the South, the Midwest and even Massachusetts last week. Florida has deployed over 450 trained volunteers and staff to these disasters since March 1, 2011. These folks not only serve their fellow man, they come back to Florida better prepared to respond to Florida events. I want you to know that we do not wait each year for June 1 and the start of hurricane season to be ready for disaster response. The American Red Cross remains on guard each day, everyday.

American Red Cross Services – What We Do In Times of Disaster

Our citizens rely on the American Red Cross to provide comfort and care during an emergency. Floridians in particular know that the American Red Cross will be there to provide the basics of food, shelter and a shoulder to lean on in times of disaster. But it is important to know the details of these services and I would like to take a moment to expand on them.

Sheltering – Shelters often become a focal point for the interaction between disaster victims and the community at large. They are a place of safety, refuge and comfort for many. When a family or individual walks through the door of a shelter operated or supported by the Red Cross, they can expect food, a safe place to sleep, mental health support, functional and access services and basic first aid and health care. The Red Cross often uses congregate sheltering in facilities such as schools, churches, or other large facilities as shelters for individuals or families. Those shelters may be opened in anticipation of a disaster, during an evacuation, or after a disaster occurs. The Red Cross usually initiates sheltering activities in coordination with government and/or emergency management or with other community organizations.

In Florida, we are prepared to support and manage safe Hurricane Evacuation Centers, which really serve as a lifeboat, bringing bring people out of harm's way as well as shelters where we provide the types of services listed above.

We coordinate our shelter operations with our government partners. The State of Florida has adopted the American Red Cross National Shelter System as their official State Shelter

Database. Subsequently, during a tropical event, through the Division of Emergency Management's website: floridadisaster.org, we are able to provide both responders and Floridians with a public site that can direct people to open shelters. In partnership with the Florida Department of Health, we also indicate any open Medical Needs shelters. We are committed to the important work of moving people out of the shelter environment and into transitional and long term housing. This is where our communities truly depend on our partnerships with Federal, state and local government.

Feeding – In addition to feeding efforts at shelters, the Red Cross also meets this basic need through mobile distribution and fixed feeding sites in affected areas for people who cannot travel to a shelter, those who choose to stay in their homes or those cleaning up after a storm. Emergency workers or other groups providing disaster relief need meals as well and the local chapter or disaster relief operation can provide feeding services to those groups. Mobile feeding is critical to meeting the immediate needs of affected communities and establishing the presence of Red Cross relief efforts. Red Cross workers drive through damaged neighborhoods delivering meals, snacks and beverages to people returning to and cleaning up damaged homes.

Bulk Distribution – In many disasters, essential items clients need to assist their recovery might not be immediately available in the local area. In such cases, the Red Cross distributes clean up kits, shovels, insect repellent, sunscreen, toiletry items or other things that may be needed. This may be accomplished through the establishment of fixed Emergency Aid Stations or mobile bulk distribution.

Disaster Mental Health Services – Red Cross workers provide mental health services wherever a client is in need. Our mental health workers are present at shelters, feeding sites and emergency aid stations. They also travel with our Integrated Care Teams including caseworkers, and console families at hospitals and in disaster affected neighborhoods where clean up and rebuilding is taking place. Red Cross mental health volunteers are licensed mental health professionals and often work with practitioners in the community.

Client Casework – Disaster victims often need the type of one-on-one advocacy our caseworkers can provide. In the complex world of disasters, it is often hard to know where to get help and how to start on the road to recovery. Red Cross caseworkers are skilled in matching a client's needs with the resources available in the community and then advocating on behalf of the client to access those resources. Caseworkers can also help their clients with wellness issues such as replacing lost medication or damaged medical equipment.

Safe And Well Information – Red Cross workers help concerned family members communicate with their loved ones during an emergency. Within the disaster affected area and through the use of tools like our *Safe and Well* website, the Red Cross helps individuals and family members to communicate with family and friends outside of the affected area.

Outreach to People With Disabilities – In developing mass care and sheltering capacity throughout the community, the American Red Cross has made it a priority nationwide to ensure that services and shelters are as accessible as possible to people with disabilities, as well as functional and access needs. Our Red Cross chapters work closely with their local Centers for Independent Living offices on disability issues as well other expert organizations. To that end we have been taking a number of steps including:

- Reviewing all our shelters for accessibility

- Participating on the Policy and Analysis working groups with our state partners to plan for Functional Needs Support Services in shelters.
- Working with other subject matter experts (including experts from FEMA, State Emergency Management, our State Disability Coordinator, and the State Department of Health) to identify specific items that need to be available in shelters to make them more accessible to people with disabilities. Based on those recommendations, we have pre-stocked accessible cots, shower stools and commode chairs in some of our warehouses.
- Focus on Training:
 - Providing training developed by the American Red Cross in conjunction with our State Disability Coordinator to Red Cross chapters, the Florida Association of Centers for Independent Living and local Emergency Management in order that they might be able to survey a building for accessibility and compliance with all ADA regulations
 - With the Department of Health, Emergency Management and Florida State University we are developing training for shelter workers on how to provide functional and access services to shelter residents. This training will be out in the next few months.

Diversity Issues

We carefully analyze the demographics of our very diverse state in our response planning. From our training to our casework to public messaging, we offer materials in Spanish and much of it also in Creole. With our other chapter partners, we are working to coordinate and expand our language bank and other diverse language resources to be sure that we have the capacity to effectively communicate with those with limited skills in English.

Government, Nonprofit and Other Partner Collaboration

In Florida, as is the case across the country, the American Red Cross staffs the state and local Emergency Operation Center(s) (EOC) with Red Cross Government Liaisons who collaborate with their government and nonprofit agency counterparts. This staffing provides a direct link between the government agency most directly responsible for the event and the Red Cross and the resources that we can bring to support that government agency.

The Red Cross takes a lead role in actively working with the local VOADs (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster), which are coalitions of voluntary agencies that meet regularly to ensure a coordinated community response that addresses the needs of victims and minimizes overlap of services in the event of a disaster.

To ensure effective disaster readiness and response, the Red Cross has established relationships with partner community agencies. While our national headquarters seeks out and negotiates partnerships with national-level agencies and organizations, our local chapters make those partnerships come alive by establishing and nurturing local relationships. Besides the VOAD partnerships, we look to AmeriCorps, CERT (Community Emergency Response Teams), the Florida General Baptist Association, the NAACP and many other faith-based groups in times of disaster.

Social Media: A New Tool in Disaster Preparedness and Response

The American Red Cross is a 130-year old organization, and the tools we use to respond to disasters have evolved over the years. Perhaps the most exciting innovations are social technologies because they allow us to listen to and engage with the public as never before.

We saw this with our fundraising efforts during Haiti. When we rolled out our mobile giving campaign, Text HAITI to 90999, it was the social media community who took it viral. In the first 48 hours, there were 2.3 million re-tweets of our Text number as people sent it to their networks of followers. Before long, we had raised \$32 million dollars via text - \$10 at a time. And 42 percent of our text donors were under the age of 34.

We saw the same phenomenon with Japan. The earthquake happened at 2:47 a.m. east coast time in the US, and in hours, our text number was trending on Twitter. Social media communities were already way ahead of us.

But new technologies are not just helping us fundraise; they are becoming part of our operational DNA.

In Haiti, we sent out 4 million text messages to Haitians about the symptoms of cholera and how to prevent and treat it.

Here at home, we have built a dynamic shelter map using Google maps to update our open shelter information. We provide this information to the public on our website and have built an iPhone app so people can find a shelter on their mobile phone.

We are also helping families connect in those first hours after disaster strikes through our Safe and Well website, where people can post their whereabouts and update their Facebook and Twitter status.

We are training Red Cross volunteers who deploy to disasters to use their smart phones and social media to let people know where they can go to find shelter, food and other services. And we are creating a new digital volunteer role where volunteers can help us monitor, authenticate and route incoming disaster requests without ever leaving their homes.

We know that in a crisis, people turn to the communications tools they are familiar with every day, and disaster response and relief agencies must do the same.

An American Red Cross survey last year found that more web users get emergency information from social media than from a NOAA weather radio, government website or emergency text message system. And not only are they seeking information, they are sharing it. One in 5 social media users report posting eyewitness accounts of emergency events. If someone else is in need, they are enlisting their social networks to help or using Facebook and Twitter to notify response agencies.

And, they expect us to be listening and responding.

- 69% said that emergency responders should be monitoring social media sites
- 74% expected help to come less than an hour after their tweet or Facebook post.

These are very high expectations. But today, they don't match reality. Most disaster responders are still not staffed to monitor or respond to requests via social media during major events.

At the Red Cross, we experienced a heartbreaking situation after the earthquake in Haiti when we began receiving tweets from people trapped under collapsed buildings. We didn't have a good way to handle those pleas for help. We had to go through the messages manually and try to route them to the right places. In some cases, it was too late.

While we won't solve these issues today, we are making progress in collaboration with our partners as we're seeing in the spring storms. People affected by recent tornadoes are posting urgent needs at an online gathering point. Working with an organization called Tweak the Tweet, as well as with FEMA and Crisis Commons, we are able to share this information with the state Emergency Operations Centers and connect crisis social data with decision-makers who can act on it.

American Red Cross: Ready for 2011

In our efforts to continuously prepare for the coming season, I am pleased to share our ongoing efforts with you:

- **Supplies:** We have expanded pre-positioning supply inventory to support feeding and sheltering for 500,000 people.
- **Technological Improvements:** We have upgraded our IT systems to improve greater controls over financial management and can more easily share shelter and client information with our partners.
- **Improved Relationships:** Our Disaster Field Structure is aligned by state and provides a point of contact and integration of plans with other Federal and state officials across the country. We rely upon this robust network to provide field support, performance improvement, strategic project management and federal disaster relations.
- **Communications:** We have pre-positioned communications equipment and supplies in 48 cities in high-risk states including Florida.
- **Logistics:** We have built a more effective logistics; supply chain and inventory control system and are more engaged with NORTHCOM, the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) and FEMA's logistics teams.
- **Volunteers:** We have more than 80,000 people in disaster response database, 93% of which are volunteers.
- There are other improvements post-Katrina that will ensure improved response from the Red Cross to those we serve, including:
 - Creation of the National Shelter System
 - Enhancements to the Coordinated Assistance Network (CAN)
 - Better coordination with other nonprofit partners and agencies
 - Refinements to the *Safe and Well* website
 - Redesign of the Shelter Intake Form in conjunction with DHS to better evaluate health needs of shelter residents

Closing Remarks

My fellow Floridians and I are privileged to live in one of the most beautiful places in the world. But because our beautiful waterways can turn into destructive surge zones and our winds can be some of the hard and fastest in the country, , we also know it is an awesome responsibility to

ensure that Florida is one the most prepared places on the planet. I am confident that the plans, processes and partnerships that we have in place with our Federal, state, local, nonprofit and private sector partners will result in a proud and strong response from Red Crossers in this region and around the country.

Thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.