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**Protecting Every Citizen: Assessing Preparedness for
Underserved Populations**

Good morning Chairman Payne, and other members of the Subcommittee. On behalf of Colonel Patrick J. Callahan of the New Jersey State Police, who also serves as the State Director of Emergency Management, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify here today.

I am Major Louis Bucchere, Commanding Officer of the New Jersey State Police Emergency Management Section, known as the *New Jersey Office of Emergency Management* (NJOEM). I am accompanied today by Ms. Kelly Boyd, who serves as NJOEM's Access and Functional Needs Planner. Ms. Boyd and I are honored to be here to share some of New Jersey's lessons learned from Hurricane Irene, Superstorm Sandy and other incidents with regard to planning and preparedness for vulnerable populations, as well as collaborative Statewide planning initiatives for vulnerable populations.

The New Jersey emergency management community is committed to providing fair and equitable emergency management services and resources to each of our residents, as well as minimizing barriers and impediments to obtaining services. We do this by actively including individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs (DAFN), advocacy groups, community groups and faith-based organizations in our emergency management program – providing them with not only a voice in emergency management, but a role as well. That role can extend from personal preparedness to working as an emergency manager to participating in any number of volunteer programs, working groups, advocacy groups and other collaborative efforts to ensure that our mutual goals are achievable. In short, we look at each person, not only as someone who may need our services, but also as a person who can contribute to a more resilient and self-reliant New Jersey. Preparedness and inclusion are key to this empowerment.

New Jersey is no stranger to natural disasters. During the prior 10 years, we have had numerous Nor'easters, winter storms, floods, wind events, and of course Hurricane Irene, Tropical Storm Lee and Superstorm Sandy. Each of these incidents involved unique circumstances and required us to take a hard look at the adequacy of State and local planning and response efforts, our collaborative networks and access to resources, and the short- and long-term impacts to individuals and communities. *Most importantly, we learned about the significant challenges faced by some of our more vulnerable residents – but we also learned how to incorporate their experience and expertise into the planning process to provide the services they need, not the services we think they need.*

The term “vulnerable populations” encompasses a diverse array of individuals. Although traditionally low-income families and individuals have not been identified as a separate planning group, low-income families may be more likely to require sheltering and evacuation assistance than families with greater financial resources, and therefore require emergency management services during both large and small incidents. Other groups considered vulnerable are individuals

with disabilities and others with access and functional needs, which encompass those who have mobility impairments, developmental disabilities, mental health conditions, and critical transportation needs, and communication barriers. Residents may also develop disabilities and access and functional needs as they age. Additionally, veterans and first responders may suffer long-term adverse physical and behavioral consequences from their service.

Some key statistics for the State are contained in the following table:

Disability Statistics in New Jersey	
<i>From the 2017 American Community Survey, as provided by NJLWD</i>	
Total civilian noninstitutionalized population	8,902,432
Total civilian population with a disability	914,392
Population with a hearing difficulty	221,680
Population with a vision difficulty	165,293
Population with a cognitive difficulty	334,209
Population with an ambulatory difficulty	488,741
Children with a disability (17 and under)	70,560
Adults with a disability (18-64)	428,932
Seniors with a disability (65+)	414,900

Superstorm Sandy

Although it has been nearly seven years since Superstorm Sandy wreaked havoc on New Jersey, it remains at the forefront of discussions for continuous evaluation of response operations, improvements in planning, and building capacity and capabilities. Perhaps most importantly, Sandy shined a light on areas for improvement with respect to emergency preparedness for vulnerable populations.

During Superstorm Sandy, local emergency managers were overwhelmed by storm preparations and response efforts. Shelter operations presented many challenges and frustrations to both residents and service providers. Many of our residents had never experienced a storm of that magnitude and were not prepared to evacuate to emergency shelters or to shelter in place.

- Shelters were flooded with large numbers of residents who required various levels of personal care assistance, medications, durable medical equipment, and other support services.
- Individuals went to shelters without a full understanding of the minimal conditions provided in an evacuation shelter. This was particularly difficult for older adults who evacuated to shelters from 55+ communities and for families with small children who found it difficult to adjust to shelter life, as well as for those with DAFN.
- Often, residents did not bring necessary supplies with them because they assumed these items would be available in the shelters.
- Older adults and others did not have necessary prescription medications, or did not know the names/dosages of their life-sustaining medications.
- Disruptions to power supplies at the shelters created problems for individuals with medical devices requiring power, and power outages in impacted communities impeded access to prescription drugs, dialysis treatment and other services.

Many shelter workers and volunteers were not trained to assist individuals with autism, developmental disabilities and PTSD, or address the needs of methadone clients. Some shelter staff were not familiar with communication boards and other aids available to foster interactions with individuals who do not speak English. In some instances, there was confusion regarding rules for service animals and comfort animals in shelters. Individuals who required medical monitoring went to overcrowded hospitals when local governments were not able to provide adequate medical needs sheltering – only to be returned back to medical needs shelters. Staff at medical needs shelters, working without the benefit of previously employed plans and procedures, faced shortages of equipment, staff, and trained medical personnel.

We also encountered challenges throughout the State with communications and communication networks. Language barriers prevented some residents from having full access to necessary preparedness messaging. Individuals arriving at reception centers, shelters and other locations struggled with the lack of translators, which hampered service delivery and casework. Ensuring seamless communications with those who are deaf and hard of hearing and/or blind and visually impaired was also challenging.

- During the recovery phase of Sandy, there were challenges in disseminating recovery information to non-English speaking communities, which impeded their access to recovery funds.
- Some groups were disenfranchised due to the absence of political influences or networks and alliances within their community.
- Older adults and others had difficulty navigating websites to obtain recovery information and file applications.

Sandy disrupted daily life for tens of thousands of residents, including young children who suffered trauma from being displaced and the disruption to their daily routines. Some displaced children were not able to get to school from their shelters until the local boards of education were able to identify their location and arrange busing. Some transportation-dependent individuals were sent to shelters distant from their jobs and communities, which affected their ability to work.

While many individuals worked tirelessly during Sandy to provide necessary services to our impacted residents, the emergency management community recognized that we had to make substantial improvements with outreach to provide better, more efficient services to our vulnerable residents, and to ensure that our staff and volunteers have all the tools and resources required for an effective response. It was also clear that the cadre of emergency management personnel, emergency workers and volunteers was not sufficient to respond to the needs of New Jersey's 9 million residents; "all hands on deck" would be required.

Although New Jersey is a resource-rich state, our experiences in Sandy showed that the collaborative networks required to leverage our agencies, partners, NGOs and community and faith based organizations were not as robust as they could have been to enable more efficient and effective communications and service delivery for vulnerable populations. Also, while many plans existed at the State and local levels, more coordinated training and exercising of those plans was required – especially with respect to the inclusion of enhancements for, and participation by, the DAFN population.

Collaborative and Inclusive Solutions

In the aftermath of Sandy and other incidents that have impacted New Jersey, our emergency management community at all levels within the State has engaged in a continuous collaborative review and evaluation of responses to incidents, planning, training and exercising.¹ More importantly, we have an increased focus on relationship building across all levels – with the end goal of inclusive, whole community engagement. This emanates from the top down and the bottom up, and emphasizes the inclusion of stakeholders across all realms at the State and local level, such as federal, state and local agencies, advocacy groups, and community and faith based organizations that serve DAFN populations, older adults, and low income communities.

Collaborative and inclusive planning is the best solution for serving the diverse needs of our vulnerable populations. State level planning groups, working in tandem with local emergency managers, ensure that best practices and access to resources and training are available to low income urban and rural areas, as well as the wealthier communities. NJOEM ensures coordination between State planning efforts and initiatives with local practices, while respecting “home rule” and recognizing that local leaders, groups and emergency managers understand their community’s needs and capabilities.

- Task forces and planning groups have been established at all levels to foster collaboration, identify gaps and resources, and develop inclusive plans by harnessing the subject matter expertise of the DAFN community and other vulnerable populations.
- These individuals and groups are now integrated in the emergency management community. *Because they are in the best position to voice their concerns and identify solutions and resources, they are an integral part of the solution.*

Collaborative planning at the State level is spearheaded through the State Emergency Management Program Stakeholders (SEMPS), which brings together emergency management staff from key State agencies, NGOs, community groups, federal partners, and the county offices of emergency management. This group meets and/or exercises on a monthly basis. In fact, most of the key department emergency managers for major agencies and organizations serving the State are on a first name basis with each other and with the County Emergency Management Coordinators. While the SEMPS group focuses on wide-ranging planning initiatives at the State level, many of the relationships developed through the SEMPS meetings and exercises provide integral support for initiatives for vulnerable populations, and ensure that the emergency management community at the local level is able to draw upon and connect with social services, programs, counseling, and access to necessary resources to support emergency management programs.

Key SEMPS partners, such as the NJ Department of Human Services, NJ Department of Health, NJ Department of Children and Families, NJ Department of Education, American Red Cross, NJ 2-1-1, NJ Board of Public Utilities, NJ Department of the Treasury, NJ Department of Transportation, NJ Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the NJ Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness (OHSP), FEMA, and many other SEMPS agencies serve as subject

¹ The concerns voiced by vulnerable populations go beyond the issues identified during Sandy. Transportation accidents, wildfires, active shooter responses and other incidents across the Nation may generate unique preparedness concerns for segments of vulnerable populations that must also be addressed as part of our planning.

matter experts and provide resources to enhance planning and preparedness initiatives for the State's most vulnerable populations. They also participate in the task forces and planning groups established to facilitate preparedness for the DAFN community and other vulnerable populations. For instance, outreach programs such as OHSP's safety initiative for faith-based organizations can serve as an entry point for other preparedness initiatives in vulnerable communities.

One of our SEMPS partners, the State Library, developed a disaster preparedness and outreach plan to support and encourage the use of local libraries for effective disaster preparedness, response and recovery within local communities. Drawing upon best practices from Sandy, local libraries can serve as accessible meeting places. Librarians across the State are encouraged to have disaster plans, develop relationships with community emergency managers, and be prepared to disseminate important disaster information and assist residents with accessible internet access and research. This support can be extremely valuable for low-income individuals who may not have access to computers, older adults and others who may not be adept at using computers or searching for information, or others who need accessible technology.

Another example of collaborative preparedness for the DAFN community is the dynamic engagement of SEMPS partners in the promotion of State's Register Ready program administered by NJOEM:

- NJ 2-1-1 provides assistance in multiple languages and through accessible means for registering vulnerable individuals in Register Ready.
- The Department of Education disseminated Register Ready information through the local school districts.
- The American Red Cross has been distributing flyers for the Register Ready Program as part of its Home Fires Campaign.
- The Board of Public Utilities engaged public utility companies to disseminate Register Ready information with their monthly bills, in newsletters and emails, and also on their websites.
- Other agencies, such as the NJ Department of Human Services, the NJ Department of Labor and Workforce Development, and the NJ Motor Vehicle Commission also post and disseminate Register Ready information to their vulnerable clients.

Collaborative DAFN Initiatives - Core Advisory Groups

NJOEM is a strong proponent of the Core Advisory Group (CAG) concept developed by FEMA to involve individuals with DAFN in all aspects of emergency management to foster the whole community approach. Similar to the SEMPS group, the overarching goal of a CAG is to promote inclusive emergency management by encouraging collaboration and partnerships between community disability stakeholders and emergency managers. Knowledge of the specific needs of this often-overlooked vulnerable population enables emergency managers to become more inclusive in their planning efforts, as various disability stakeholders are able to bring unique resources to the table to assist them in their planning.

CAGs are encouraged to meet on a regular basis to discuss any issues, best practices, new legislation, and litigation to bring about positive changes in how emergency services are provided to the DAFN community in the event of a disaster.

State Core Advisory Group

A State level CAG, known as the New Jersey Group for Access and Integration Needs in Emergencies and Disasters (NJGAINED), Chaired by the New Jersey Department of Human Services and Co-chaired by NJOEM, has been in place for over 12 years. The group includes representation from many State agencies and offices that service the DAFN community, such as the Division of Disability Services, the Division of Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and the Division of Developmental Disabilities. NJGAINED also includes disability advocacy groups and other organizations, including Disability Rights New Jersey, Centers for Independent Living, Statewide Parent Advocacy Network and others, as well as representation from faith based organizations and county CAGs. The FEMA Region 2 Disability Integration Advisor and Disability Integration Specialist, as well as the FEMA Integration Team assigned to NJ, also participate in NJGAINED meetings.

During Superstorm Sandy, which occurred during 2012 just as FEMA was rolling out its Disability Integration Advisors program, NJGAINED provided critical support to the DAFN community and served as subject matter experts to the State and local emergency managers. For example:

- NJGAINED members banded together during the Sandy response and recovery efforts to field requests for assistance.
- The NJ Division of Disability Services received many requests for help through its Information & Referral hotline. Many of the requests were related to needs for durable medical equipment, wheelchair ramp repairs and/or housing.
- NJGAINED assisted in sending out emergency alerts and made calls to individuals to see if help was needed. Members also shared important updates and provided information on how individuals with DAFN could obtain assistance after the storm.
- NJGAINED members participated in daily briefings to share concerns.
- Through the intervention of NJGAINED, one of the NJ Centers for Independent Living also partnered with FEMA to set up an Individual Assistance Center in their office.

One of NJGAINED's current initiatives includes establishing a Statewide Functional Assessment and Service Team (FAST). A FAST serves as a strike team to conduct assessments of individuals with DAFN at mass care shelters or other areas of refuge. A FAST also conducts aggregate assessments of individuals with functional needs for the purposes of supplying disaster intelligence and damage assessments, enhancing resource management and improving disaster recovery planning. A concept of operations was recently drafted and the group is in the process of identifying State members to be a part of the team.

In addition, NJGAINED is working on DAFN emergency preparedness brochures and promoting mass care trainings. The group also continues to evaluate current events in emergency management and promote best practices for DAFN populations.

County Core Advisory Groups

During the last few years, with the support of FEMA and NJOEM, several New Jersey counties have formed CAGs, and many other counties have been in discussions with local disability advocacy groups to develop CAGs in their counties. Because NJOEM believes that

CAGs represent an ideal solution to effective and inclusive collaborative planning for DAFN preparedness, we have tied funding to this initiative. The State now requires each county to participate in the CAG process as part of its Emergency Management Agency Assistance (EMAA) grant work plan. Additionally, FEMA is currently developing a CAG toolkit and presentation to help guide counties in developing CAGs.

The county CAGs have taken on significant projects and initiatives, many of which are being replicated in other counties or supported at the State level, and include:

- Developing and conducting a Community Reception Center Radiation Emergency exercise, focused on serving the DAFN population.
- Hosting the State's first DAFN Overnight Emergency Shelter Simulation to provide emergency responders with experience in working with the DAFN community and to familiarize members of the DAFN community with a shelter experience.
- Creating a DAFN Active Shooter Preparedness video with tips on how law enforcement and the DAFN community should best respond to an incident.
 - The DAFN Active Shooter Preparedness Working Group is spearheaded by a County CAG with support from State agencies and NJOEM.
 - Currently, the group is organizing an active shooter preparedness training and a tabletop exercise for key staff from all NJ dialysis centers.
- Serving on a panel at a summit on school safety hosted by the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities to address students with disabilities and active shooter incidents.
- Conducting an outreach event and panel discussion on Emergency Preparedness and People with Disabilities as part of Disability Awareness Month in October.
- Developing the Pathways to Preparedness Guide for vulnerable individuals to prepare for all types of emergencies, created at the request of the Statewide Independent Living Council.
- Hosting classes for inclusive Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training.
- Staffing emergency preparedness booths at expos and conferences, attended by thousands of vulnerable residents, their caregivers, and those who work in the field.

As a result of the strong relationships developed with FEMA through their support of the CAGs and NJGAINED, the NJOEM AFN Planner and Middlesex County's Deputy Emergency Manager also provided input as staff from FEMA Region 2 demonstrated use of the Disability Resource Database, the Region's first database to offer disability-related resources that can be utilized by emergency managers and other stakeholders during emergencies.

Emergency Management Integration through the County AFN Coordinators

To enhance coordination with the county and local emergency management community, each county in New Jersey is required to appoint a County AFN Coordinator to oversee local emergency management planning pertaining to vulnerable populations, provide trainings, assist with issues in vulnerable communities as they arise, and coordinate with the NJOEM AFN Planner.

The County AFN Coordinator is also expected to attend the County CAG meetings to ensure consistency and integration. The County AFN Coordinators meet quarterly along with other stakeholder groups, including Centers for Independent Living and other advocacy groups, as well as the many State agencies that plan for the State's vulnerable populations. These meetings provide a forum for key partners to provide briefings, best practices, and information on new legislation, and to discuss areas of concern. Training on various topics regarding vulnerable populations in emergency management is provided at each meeting.

Some of the recent preparedness and planning initiatives and trainings addressed by the County AFN Coordinators include:

- Enhancing Register Ready outreach, and upgrading the system's search capabilities, and GIS and mapping functions.
- Discussing new or proposed legislation with DAFN impact.
- Evaluating formation of County Functional Assessment Service Teams and Core Advisory Groups.
- Working with suppliers and entering into MOUs for medical equipment and supplements that might be needed during emergencies.
- Receiving trainings on a variety of topics, including service animals; renal dialysis preparedness and response; utilizing Register Ready; and accommodating vulnerable populations at shelters and Community Reception Centers.
- Partnering with FEMA to keep current on regional and national projects, such as the Region's new Disability Resource Database and the NJ Mapping Project, which looks at where vulnerable populations reside in New Jersey.
- Working with partners to host a number of trainings, including Emergency Preparedness: Access and Functional Needs in the Disability Community; Autism Shield; Care Assistant Fundamentals; Responding to the Disabilities and Access and Functional Needs Community (a CERT workshop); and Emergency Preparedness Tips for Families of Individuals Who Have Autism, among others.
- Participating in exercises, such as the Central East Regional Coalition Emerging Infectious Disease/Ebola exercise and discussion.

New Jersey State Sheltering Task Force and Subcommittees

The New Jersey State Sheltering Task Force (STF) is a multi-agency planning team formed in 2014 with a view toward understanding the capabilities and gaps in sheltering throughout the State, and to identify areas for improvement, including those experienced by vulnerable populations during Superstorm Sandy. The STF has visited with and assessed sheltering gaps and best practices in each of the 21 counties, as well as several larger urban areas across the State. To address the most common problems/gaps identified among the counties and urban areas, the STF established three subcommittees: DAFN; Staffing; and Facilities. These subcommittees have issued guidance and recommendations for whole-community shelter training curriculum, shelter facility supply lists and ADA guidelines, and DAFN preparedness information for sheltering and evacuation.

Register Ready

Register Ready is a secure and voluntary database, administered by NJOEM, and designed for residents to enter their personal and DAFN-specific information so that emergency response agencies can better plan to serve them in a disaster or other emergency. Currently, the Office of the Public Guardian requires that vulnerable children be registered in Register Ready based on Court Orders.

Register Ready serves as a planning tool for emergency managers to gain a better understanding of the needs of individuals living in their communities to help facilitate planning for sheltering, evacuation and other emergencies. At present, approximately 22,000 New Jersey residents and over 300 facilities are registered in the Register Ready database. The system also offers GIS mapping capabilities to allow emergency managers to hone in on individuals who may need assistance if a disaster strikes a particular area.

Register Ready has been used by emergency managers for localized incidents as well as large incidents, such as Superstorm Sandy. County and local staff with administrative rights can access information for residents in their jurisdiction, and receive periodic trainings on how to use the system. Information in Register Ready can be used to generate reverse 911 calls, support wellness checks, and identify special needs before, during or after an incident. Information obtained from Register Ready can help emergency managers plan for specific needs in their community, such as preparing for oxygen needs, durable medical equipment and other supplies in shelters; facilitating accessible transportation to shelters; and arranging for interpreters and translation tools.

Training and Guidance

Working through the NJOEM AFN Planner, stakeholders at the federal, State and local levels have developed and offered training and guidance for individuals, families, emergency management personnel, first responders, disability advocacy groups, volunteers and other partners.

- NJOEM, with the support of the Progressive Center for Independent Living (PCIL), developed a module for the CERT curriculum entitled *Responding to the Disabilities and Access and Functional Needs Community*.
- NJOEM and the Department of Human Services partner to offer *Emergency Preparedness: Access and Functional Needs in the Disability Community* to enhance emergency planning involving the disability community.
- The State's Medical Reserve Corps (MRC), PCIL and the American Red Cross developed a program to train MRC and CERT members to serve as personal care assistants in shelters.
- *Emergency Preparedness Tips for Families of Individuals Who Have Autism*, a workshop developed by The Alliance Center for Independence and NJOEM, provides essential tips to help caregivers prepare to withstand various types of emergencies. There is also another version of the presentation that provides autism-specific tips for emergency managers and first responders.
- The State periodically offers *Autism Shield*, a workshop provided by Parents of Autistic Children, to law enforcement, public health workers, and emergency management officials from around New Jersey. This workshop provides participants with

information to enhance recognition of a person with autism and identify appropriate response methods for first responders working in field situations.

Exercises

The State is a strong proponent of inclusive exercises at the State and local level, with input and participation by the NJOEM AFN Planner, CAGs, and disability advocacy groups. The State plans for all hazards, including natural disasters, incidents at the State's nuclear power plants, rail/air/other transportation incidents, active shooter situations, and other incidents. Recent exercises included:

- the Newark Airport 2018 Full Scale Exercise, for which the NJOEM AFN Planner served as an evaluator
- the annual LIFT exercise at Trenton-Mercer Airport to help staff learn to interact with the autism community
- the annual State-level functional emergency management exercises addressing radiological incidents, transportation incidents, and hurricane responses, which also tested DAFN components of sheltering and evacuation
- the County DAFN overnight shelter simulations that provided training to DAFN individuals as well as emergency management staff and volunteers
- the NJ Transit annual rail drills involving CAG participation and evaluation

Summary - Lessons Learned

In addition to the foregoing, some of the specific lessons learned by our emergency management community from the responses to Sandy and other incidents with respect to vulnerable populations are:

- It is necessary to clarify expectations of both the emergency management community and vulnerable populations to minimize misunderstandings.
 - Emergency managers and community leaders must gain a better understanding of their constituents.
 - Registries, such as the State's Register Ready program and other local registries, can help emergency managers and first responders plan for the needs of vulnerable populations.
 - Vulnerable populations should understand the limitations of local emergency plans and resources and take steps to increase individual preparedness.
 - Emergency managers should be cognizant of the needs of their local vulnerable populations, as well as the resources that they bring to the table.
 - Federal funding to support community outreach and preparedness efforts at the local level would enhance preparedness efforts and improve response and recovery.

- Effective and efficient emergency management requires personal preparedness on the part of all individuals, and vulnerable populations will require tailored preparedness materials.
 - Individuals need specific information regarding what to expect in sheltering, what to pack for evacuation and sheltering, how to obtain information about evacuation and sheltering, and how to make an emergency plan.
 - Individuals should understand when and how to shelter in place, and what the practical consequences are for registering with State or local special needs registries, with the utility companies, etc.
 - Websites that convey emergency management information should be compatible with accessible screen reader programs and provide options for alternate languages, if possible.
 - Local governments and agencies should collaborate with VOAD members and non-profits, such as NJ 2-1-1, to enhance and amplify emergency messaging, and provide vulnerable residents with information on where they can find assistance and information for recovery programs, warming, and cooling shelters.
 - NJOEM social media platforms (e.g. Facebook and Twitter), ready.nj.gov and Register Ready are compatible with accessible screen reader programs and have multi-language translation capability.
- Alerts and warnings, and preparedness information should be disseminated in multiple formats to ensure receipt by those with visual or hearing impairments.
 - Communication boards and other aids should be available in shelters and other locations.
 - Community and faith based organizations should be tapped to provide translation services and amplify messaging to assist non-English speaking populations.
 - Emergency managers should explore new communication technologies and develop relationships with individuals within the community or through volunteer agencies who can serve as translators, ASL interpreters, etc. in shelters and other service locations.
 - Federal funding should be available to assist with acquiring adaptive technologies and enhanced 911 services.
- Older adults and others may need assistance navigating computer technology to access preparedness information, recovery benefits, etc.
 - Local emergency managers should work with federal, State and local partners and volunteer groups to ensure that individuals are able to use the technology required, or to have alternate systems in place.
- Education departments and local school boards must be included in the planning processes to facilitate use of schools as shelters, ensure minimal disruption of education for children displaced by the incident, provide counseling as necessary for impacted students, and ensure school safety.

- Assistance centers where disaster and social services are offered, must be accessible by those with transportation needs and offer flexible hours.
 - Local emergency managers and social service departments should ensure that transportation is being provided to and from the assistance centers and that the centers have flexible operating hours to accommodate the needs of the local residents.
- Disaster relief funding should consider additional needs for vulnerable populations.
 - Additional funding may be needed to ensure that those who have physical disabilities receiving funds to elevate their homes also receive funds to install stair chairs, elevators, or proper ramping, etc., so that they have access into the home.
 - Rental assistance funding should be supplemented with further funding for food, clothing, etc.
- Vulnerable populations are disproportionately burdened by delays in the funding process because they do not have the financial means to sustain their needs.
 - Funding for training and more staff to speed up the application review process would be beneficial.

Although New Jersey has come a long way since Sandy, we know that we have many tasks ahead of us. We are confident, however, that our emergency managers and our residents are committed to a stronger, more resilient New Jersey with equal access to services for everyone. We thank you for this opportunity to testify to this sub-committee.