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Government Reform Committee Hearing
Emergency Preparedness in the Nation's Capital with an Emphasis on Grant Management and Coordination
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Good Morning.

I am grateful for the opportunity to appear before you today to testify on emergency preparedness in the National Capital Region (NCR) with an emphasis on first responder grant management and coordination. This subject is crucial to Prince George's County where over 835,000 residents live and over 100 different dialects are spoken.

During fiscal years 2002 and 2003, Prince George's County received approximately $10.4 million dollars in grant funding. Details of the funding use are as follows: Hazardous materials truck, decontamination supplies, decontamination vehicle, breathing air units, incident command training, incident command vehicles, radios, radiological detection unit, tanker unit, keycard control system, salaries, personal protective equipment (level A,B,C,D), Computer Aided Dispatch System upgrade, emergency management salaries, disease surveillance system, epidemiologic response plan, high speed internet connection, critical information network, training of key public health officials and citizen volunteer training.

There are several challenges in obtaining federal funding for emergency preparedness. Timeliness—there are delays in receiving money from the state. Once the federal government decides how much each state is to receive, the state must then determine the recipient amount to be awarded. The assessment phase should be a clearly defined process. In 2003, a state assessment was conducted. There were limited resources available to assist the County in preparing for the completion of this process. This assessment has been and continues to be the qualifying factor for funding over the last two years without any opportunity for adjustments.

There is also a need for the clarification of processes in areas where there is state and regional funding sources. At times there appear to be overlaps in the accomplishments of the two funding sources –State Homeland Security and Urban Area Security Initiative. There have even been occurrences where the state has created internal regional relationships adding yet another dimension to this situation. The state on at least two occasions has made an allocation a regional grant between 3 counties with vastly different geographies, populations and vulnerabilities. The three entities had to come to a consensus on the spending before the funds were allocated. After more than 6 months of this issue being unresolved, the state approved an equal split of the funds.

Advance notice that grants will be reimbursable would assist us in enhanced planning during our budgetary process. We recently learned that at least $2MM had been allocated to our county via a reimbursable grant. Funds for this amount were unavailable; therefore, we are faced with unplanned forward funding. Additionally a lack of consistent awards causes a deficiency in the algorithm of the budget process. Understanding the reimbursement basis of grant funding especially as it relates to jurisdictions within the County would be a tremendous benefit.

The National Incident Management System is the most recent criteria that must be adhered to regarding upcoming funding. Little has been shared regarding the details of the protocols for compliance, but we are expected to be prepared to adopt this initiative within three months.

Many jurisdictions lack the experienced personnel to handle the grant processes at all levels—local, state and federal. The State Administrative Agency should be readily accessible for assistance/clarification regarding the funding process.

Challenges continue to exist within the NCR related to organizing and implementing efficient and effective regional preparedness programs. While most events in this area would become a regional issue, there is no regional emergency operation/coordination center from which to command activities. We are fortunate to have a regional emergency coordination plan and this area could be better served with a regional emergency operation/coordination center and regional response teams.

With so many jurisdictions in the NCR, collaboration is a real challenge.

There are several gaps which remain in the emergency preparedness of the NCR
Interoperability issues still exist and are at the top of the list. This issue is extremely expensive and we are still experiencing inter and intra communication deficiencies within this county. There is an inability for us to speak with each other except through patching. There is also an inability to speak with our neighbors, our regional partners via 800 MHz.

There should be regional coordination of emergency plans. All plans in the region should be shared among the various jurisdictions. Discussions are needed concerning mass evacuations that would include naming evacuation destination sites throughout various counties. There is also a need for clear and concise intelligence information

The Office of the National Capital Region Coordination has been effective in setting priorities but standards have not been set in many areas including standards for an Emergency Operations Centers.

The type of guidance that we would like to see from the Department of Homeland Security may take time to accomplish. There should be a regional emergency operations center to include the development of a regional response team. Would like more formal training regarding the National Incident Management System. It appears that the only training that is being offered is paid training conferences and seminars (other than Incident Command System). Formal training for the National Incident Management System so that the jurisdictions will be prepared to comply. The development of standards for distribution, management and oversight of the grants; a clearer direction on the states role as we are a member of a state and a regional partner; the provision of increased assistance in the development of planning concerning cyber security and; the enhancement of grant training and technical assistance will all improve the guidance needed in the National Capital Region.