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For the hearing: "FEMA Priorities for 2022: Stakeholder Perspectives"

**Before the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure's
Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management
U.S. House of Representatives**

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Good afternoon, Chairwoman Titus, Ranking Member Webster, and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Carolyn Harshman, and I am a Certified Emergency Manager and President of the International Association of Emergency Managers. IAEM is a professional organization comprised of dedicated emergency management practitioners who wake up every day thinking about and planning for both natural and human-made emergencies. I appreciate your giving me the opportunity to testify today before this Subcommittee to provide input on FEMA priorities for the coming year.

As the profession of emergency management continues to shake off the “Chicken Little” stereotype of days gone by, we are benefitting greatly from the abundance of higher education degree programs and graduates. The usefulness of our profession was infinitely clear during the early stages of COVID-19 as we coordinated organizations and resources to adapt to the evolving needs of our communities. In the meantime, the frequency of disasters and ever-present changes in climate are increasing the numbers of people and properties impacted by hazards.

I see us standing at a crossroads now as the ravaging days of the pandemic begin to wind down and we’re seeing a range of emergency managers emerge from a spectrum of industries and disciplines. With that expansion and emergency management protocols becoming more politicized, the profession needs strong guidance that will ensure we forge the best path forward. FEMA’s Strategic Plan could not have come along at a better time.

In order to be effective emergency managers, it’s imperative that we treat all of the members of our communities as equals. All politics, income levels, socioeconomic standing, or other polarizing characteristics need to be set aside to ensure equitable delivery of services in a community’s greatest time of need. FEMA’s Strategic Plan goal #1 instills equity as a foundation of emergency management.

I began my career in emergency management with the County of San Diego back in the early 1980s. I transferred into the position from the Regional Planning Department where I worked as a land-use planner processing subdivisions, facilitating community plans, and preparing the county's first water conservation ordinance. Writing the ordinance nudged me into realizing we don't live in a limitless environment and that the negative impacts have the greatest effect on the most impoverished. As a budding emergency manager, I took my knowledge of demographics and quickly saw patterns of inequity when aligned with the region's hazards. Public service announcements regarding the storage of food and water were only dreams to the families struggling to live day-to-day. Equally ineffectual were the culturally insensitive deliveries of emergency food supplies. Emergency managers need tools to better understand the cultures and realities of the communities they serve.

Strategic Plan goal #2 inspires emergency managers to lead the whole of community in matters relating to climate resilience. Like the water conservation ordinance I mentioned earlier, emergency managers must work hand-in-hand with planners, engineers, and fire professionals to create a better-built environment. As new and redeveloped construction projects are considered by a jurisdiction, it is very rare for the emergency manager to have a say in whether or not a project should be approved. Instead, the enforcers of codes and ordinances conduct reviews to determine whether or not a project conforms. This means emergency managers need to get onboard with codes and ordinances to assist in altering the future. Building better in the first place will eliminate the need for spotty retrofits and other incremental solutions. Most importantly, solidifying relationships will bring the enforcers into mitigation planning and open the door for emergency managers to participate in climate

adaptation plans and other programs aimed at climate resilience.

Strategic Plan goal #3 promotes and sustains a ready FEMA and prepared nation. These actions will greatly strengthen emergency management community capacity. At present, many of our emergency managers wear multiple hats – administrators, first responders, and other officials. The same is true in non-governmental organizations where the emergency manager is also the risk manager, safety officer, and in charge of environmental compliance. Any and all of FEMA’s efforts to standardize training, plans, and exercises will be well received especially by those struggling with multiple hats. Equally important is the need to train and empower individuals and community groups to serve as “force multipliers” as we recognize the potential and willingness of our citizens to actively engage in an emergency’s initial response.

In closing, the USA Council of the International Association of Emergency Managers is 5,100 members strong and already working hard within its 25 committees and caucuses to share ideas and develop new solutions for our members and the communities they serve. Collectively, we stand ready to contribute to the success of FEMA’s new Strategic Plan.