

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

On behalf of the

**International Association of Emergency Managers
National Association of Counties
and
National Emergency Management Association**

Submitted to the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

“FEMA: Prioritizing a Culture of Preparedness”

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International Association of Emergency Managers
201 Park Washington Court, Falls Church, VA 22046; 703-538-1795

National Association of Counties
660 N Capitol Street, NW, Suite 400, Washington, D.C. 20001; 202-393-6226

National Emergency Management Association
444 N Capitol Street, NW, Suite 401, Washington, D.C. 20001; 202-624-5459

Introduction

On behalf of the state and local emergency managers across the country and the nation's 3,069 county governments, we are pleased to submit this joint statement for the record to the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs for the hearing on April 11, 2018, entitled "FEMA: Prioritizing a Culture of Preparedness."

Whether encouraging local residents to assemble at-home preparedness kits or building capacity at the state and local levels to respond to disasters, in one form or another, preparedness weaves throughout our society. In the latter part of 2017, countless emergency managers and state and local governments, whether directly or indirectly, were involved in the response and recovery efforts related to hurricanes, flooding, wildfires, and other events across the country. These events represented a watershed moment for emergency management

From the wreckage of these events comes the opportunity for emergency managers to assess a new path forward. Just as September 11, Hurricane Katrina, and Hurricane Sandy prompted major reforms to the emergency management profession, the 2017 season provides the backdrop to reaffirm some known truths and work toward continued progress. Learning from past events, we prepare better as a nation and throughout individual communities. The recently released strategic plan for 2018-22 by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) seeks to address these goals by prioritizing preparedness, but the effort must go further by demonstrating the benefit of building capacity at the state and local levels; supporting training and education across the homeland security enterprise; and reaffirming the commitment to preparedness across all levels of government.

The 2017 Disaster Season

Professionals in emergency management often reference two factors when judging a year: how many disasters occurred in the year and how much devastation and destruction took place. By those metrics, 2017 was unprecedented. Overall, emergency managers dealt with 59 major disaster declarations, 15 emergency declarations, and 63 fire management assistance declarations in 2017. These disasters impacted 33 states and two territories, bringing the overall total to 137 declarations, the most since 2011.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the U.S. had 16 disasters last year with damage exceeding a billion dollars. Hurricane Harvey was the strongest hurricane to hit the U.S. since Hurricane Wilma in 2005 and the fiercest to strike southeast Texas since 1961. According to NOAA, the U.S. spent \$125 billion on Harvey, second only to Hurricane Katrina of 2005. Just a few weeks after Harvey, Hurricane Irma, the most intense Atlantic storm since Katrina, impacted Florida and many islands, including Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. This storm ranked third on the list of most expensive hurricanes, costing the nation \$90 billion, according to NOAA. Weeks after Irma, Hurricane Maria delivered a devastating second punch to Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and elsewhere. Ranking fifth on the all-time list, the estimated cost was \$50 billion, as stated in NOAA's "Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters: Overview."

The year also brought more than a dozen western wildfires, which ravaged thousands of acres across Northern California. In December, the massive Thomas fire in Southern California ranked as the

state's largest-ever wildfire, scorching more than 280,000 acres, or 440 square miles. These wildfires added \$18 billion in damage, triple the previous U.S. wildfire record, according to NOAA.

To top off the year, 2017 was also the third hottest year for the lower 48 states in U.S. records, which date back to 1895. Only 2012 and 2016 recorded higher temperatures. This was the third straight year that all 50 states had above average temperatures for the year. Five states, including Arizona, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and New Mexico, had their warmest year ever.

Managing Disasters Through Robust Capacity

Preparedness capabilities are critical to state, local, and tribal level emergency management systems. The inclusion of “preparedness” as a goal in the FEMA strategic plan is promising but does not match with the Administration’s budget proposal to cut grants to states and locals that would aid in building preparedness capabilities.

Beyond the 2017 federally declared disasters, 22,552 events required state assets, while local assets supported 12,557 additional local and tribal events. FEMA is not a first responder during disasters, so without a thriving state and local emergency management system, many of these 35,109 events would likely have required costly federal support. Furthermore, strong capacity at the state and local levels allows FEMA to achieve the stated goal of disasters being “locally executed, state managed, and federally supported.”

One of the key ways in which emergency managers build capacity is through programs such as the Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG). With a one-to-one matching requirement at the local and state levels, this program represents one of the best values in federal spending. EMPG continues as a critical driver of progress and success made across the country in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from all hazards. The program’s success is shared by all levels of government and relies heavily on the continued, and decades-long, commitment of Congress.

In 2017, the federal investment in EMPG was \$350 million — a little more than \$1 per citizen — and with the match requirement and additional state and local investment, the return on investment exceeded \$700 million and was felt in communities from California to Texas to Florida. Every investment the federal government makes is matched dollar-for-dollar and, in most cases, states, locals, and tribes match even more, illustrating that any cuts to EMPG funding will have far-reaching and long-term impacts on readiness. In almost every category of positive community impacts the EMPG creates, emergency managers at the state and local level report improvements since last year’s programmatic data.

For these reasons in FY19, NEMA and IAEM came together in requesting a modest five percent inflationary increase for EMPG to \$368 million. Given the matching requirement of EMPG, many of which states and locals far exceed, this \$18 million increase will have a combined impact totaling at least \$36 million nationwide. Few other federal programs can demonstrate that rate of return.

Another asset at the disposal of emergency managers is utilizing mutual aid to offset federal support, which can, thereby, drive down the overall cost of disasters. Mutual aid agreements, such as the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC), remain critical to mounting an effective response in the wake of a disaster and mobilizing tested emergency management capabilities across city, county, tribal, and state lines. For example, since February 2017, states have deployed over 18,000 personnel through EMAC in response to Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, Maria, the Las Vegas shooting incident, winter storms, and wildfires in California and Montana.

Efforts by emergency managers to drive down the cost and impact of disasters disperses the workload of response and allows state and local governments to share the burden of recovery. This requires strong partnerships, however, and requirements by the Federal government must be matched with the corresponding levels of financial support.

Toward the Common Goal of Preparedness

In the aftermath of September 11, the federal government requested the assistance of state and local governments in closing the gap between existing levels of preparedness and a “new normal.” Officials across the country responded quickly and began planning for the coming task by reorganizing governments, realigning budgets, and acquiring new subject-matter expertise, all while managing myriad federal requirements and changes in doctrine. The diversity and impact of the threats continue evolving, but the task remains the same – *assist the federal government in achieving specific tasks and elevate the level of preparedness nationwide*. This goal is achieved through planning, equipment, education, training, exercises, development of mutual aid agreements, communications systems, and countless other activities forming a system of preparedness.

Given the continued commitment by state and local governments, the President’s proposed FY19 Budget Request that cuts five preparedness grant programs is puzzling. In addition to a proposed reduction for EMPG, the request recommends a 25 percent reduction in both the State Homeland Security Grant Program (SHSGP) and Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI). Furthermore, in addition to proposed cuts for EMGP, SHSGP, and UASI, a \$129 million reduction in Education, Training, and Exercises undercuts the ability to further train current emergency management and homeland security officials and build leadership capacity with an eye toward the future.

For example, the request suggests the elimination of the entire \$18 million budget for the Center for Homeland Defense and Security (CHDS). Since its establishment in 2002, CHDS has awarded 1,018 Master’s degrees to officials at all levels of government (including federal) and maintains enrollment of approximately 160 students. CHDS has also graduated 637 participants through the nine-month Executive Leaders Program and conducted 383 executive education seminars. Students have included governors and leaders of metropolitan areas and their respective cabinets. CHDS accomplishes much more while offering all curriculum, learning technologies, and educational resources to institutional partners (375 to date) free of charge. There will be a detrimental loss of institutional knowledge within the emergency management system if capacity is not built for new emergency managers addressing the impacts of the current and future retirements in the current workforce.

Homeland security as the industry we know it today remains early in its development. Programs such as CHDS are how baseline leadership is created, and with homeland security in a constantly evolving and

emergency-threat dynamic, the nation should take pride in programs such as CHDS and all they do with its \$18 million appropriation.

Mitigation as a Function of Proactive Preparedness

Mitigation consistently remains a fraction of the response and recovery costs, which continue to accrue. Between FY2011-2014, the federal government allocated roughly \$222 million for pre-disaster mitigation compared to \$3.2 billion for post-disaster mitigation, a ratio of roughly 1:14. In the aftermath of two separate hurricanes, studies estimated that strong building codes could have significantly reduced damages, saving \$8 billion in Louisiana following Katrina and \$3.1 billion in Mississippi following a hypothetical Category 3 event. Photos of the aftermath of disaster clearly show where pre-disaster mitigation efforts and enhanced building codes support community resilience and escalate recovery efforts.

FEMA's strategic plan specifically calls for increased mitigation investments. NOAA determined that disaster events cost the country a record-breaking \$306 billion annually. As disaster costs continue to rise, state, local, territorial, and tribal governments are being asked to do more with less. Therefore, instead of cutting Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) funding by 61 percent, as President Trump's Budget Request seeks, the program should be funded to the FY18 level of at least \$249 million.

Conclusion

Emergency managers across the country stand ready to achieve national calls to reduce the costs of disasters, minimize the impact to our communities, and lessen the likelihood of future events. In order to accomplish these goals, however, the federal government must stand with us as a willing partner. FEMA's strategic plan is a strong step forward, but corresponding budget requests must be aligned with policy doctrine so as to affect the desired outcomes of increasing the national capabilities of mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.

By supporting \$368 million for EMPG, sustaining funding for SHSGP and UASI, and rejecting the elimination of CHDS and other critical training programs, Congress can demonstrate its role in this partnership and ensure a reaffirmation across all levels of government to our shared commitment to national preparedness.