

**THE NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION
A LEADER IN EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS**

STATEMENT BY:

**BARBARA DONNELLAN, COUNTY MANAGER
ARLINGTON COUNTY, VA**

**CHAIR, HOMELAND SECURITY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICERS COMMITTEE
METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS**

**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT,
INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS, AND THE DISTRICT OF
COLUMBIA**

**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENT
AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE**

JULY 31, 2013

Chairman Begich, Ranking Member Paul, and members of the Committee. I am Barbara Donnellan, County Manager of Arlington County, VA and the current Chair of the Homeland Security Executive Committee of the Chief Administrative Officers Committee (CAOs) at the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments.

Because the Council had maintained public safety, mutual aid, and planning programs for most of its history, it was recognized as the best-equipped organization to coordinate the region's preparedness activities for terrorist threats after they surfaced more than a decade ago. Our Board of Directors immediately assumed a major role by assembling a Regional Emergency Coordination Plan in 2002. We followed that achievement by developing one of the most robust regional homeland security initiatives in the nation. Our program involves local elected officials, first responders, and business and community groups, as well as federal and state officials.

I am very pleased to be here with my colleagues from the region. Because our homeland security coordination work is very detailed and continues throughout the year, all of the officials in the region have become not only colleagues but good friends. We know these relationships enhance the safety of the region.

I also want to thank this Congress and those Members of Congress who have preceded you since 2001 for supporting the significant investment in regional emergency management programs that have been vital to our work. As you may know, the CAO Committee is made up of City and County Managers and the Senior Policy Group (SPG) is made up of senior state officials from emergency

management/homeland security. They bring together many regional stakeholders to help them prepare for, mitigate, and recover from all hazards, including terrorist activities, weather-related events or other natural or man-made disasters. Because of the federal funding you have provided, local officials who work with me on the CAOs committee, along with the SPG, have been able to guide and assist our first responders, coordinate the efforts of elected officials and emergency managers, and provide systems to alert and protect the public.

The cities and counties in the National Capital Region have long maintained substantial public safety and security programs to protect their residents. We continue to do so and have expanded our efforts in recent years. However, funding through the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) has been especially important to the National Capital Region because, as you know, we are a metropolitan area that must coordinate its response across two states and the District of Columbia. Since the horrific attack on the Pentagon on 9/11, this region and other parts of the country have continued to experience instances of domestic terrorism, several hurricanes, tornadoes and severe storms, and countless high profile demonstrations.

I would now like to share some of our experiences. We have learned lessons from every incident that has occurred and, based on those lessons, continuously improved our capabilities to protect the region:

- After 9/11, our regional partners used lessons learned from our response to the Pentagon incident to inform the investment decisions we made for the use of both local tax funds and funds received through federal grants. We

used UASI and State Homeland Security Grant Funds to *train and equip first responders* and to purchase alert and warning systems for the community.

- Using real-world experiences like Hurricane Isabel to inform our investment decisions, we have used UASI funds to increase regional planning and coordination, including the development of the *NCR Regional Emergency Coordination Plan and the NCR Mutual Aid Operations Plan*.
- Our experiences with the Anthrax attack that involved letters sent to Members of Congress and media in D.C., New York, and Florida in 2001 led to UASI investments in bomb squads, *secure and interoperable communications, information sharing, and situational awareness in the region*.
- These investments produced *NCR Net*, a secure fiber optic network connecting the National Capital Region (NCR) jurisdictions; *Essence*, a public health surveillance system; and the installation of *chemical/biological sensors and cameras at Metro System entrances*.
- Terrorism incidents throughout the country led to UASI investments in *automated fingerprint identification systems (AFIS)*, which have improved our law enforcement capabilities.
- Lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina and other emergency situations led our region to use UASI funding for investments in the *Regional Integrated Transportation Information System (RITIS)* that informs evacuation decisions.
- After the snow and ice storm on January 26, 2011, we used UASI funds to further enhance the RITIS system. Now, through the *Metropolitan Area*

Transportation Operations Center (MATOC) information is shared with emergency managers, other regional offices, and residents throughout the region on a 24-7 basis.

- In the wake of the same storm, the region also established a *Virtual Joint Information Center (V-JIC)* to provide up-to-the minute information about disasters to local officials and the public. The region's public information officers use, maintain, and update the V-JIC regularly.
- In addition, the region's local officials will soon have access to a new dashboard project—a tool that quickly summarizes the most important information for officials—that is housed at the District of Columbia's Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency (HSEMA).
- One of the most useful tools in the National Capital Region is our First Hour Checklist, which guides local officials and emergency managers through the important steps to take immediately after an emergency. This was a tool developed by the SPG and the CAOs. Personally, I used it during the earthquake that struck this region in August 23, 2011. We coordinated two regional conference calls that day—one very shortly after the incident and another at 9 p.m. that night that included representatives from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the General Services Administration (GSA).
- The region's early warning water security monitoring system is one of our most innovative programs. We have monitoring sites located throughout the region that alert appropriate officials if there is a problem with the water so that they can take action to address the situation and prevent a possible tragedy.

- This year, the region will begin work on an equally important project: the need to ensure cyber security, or the safety of digital data and computer systems that have become such an integral part of our everyday lives. We will be conducting a cyber-security exercise later this year.
- The June 29th Derecho Storm that impacted the region on June 29, 2012 caused similar issues to what a cyber-security event may cause. This required governments to work with the private sector to restore 9-1-1 service to the region. Close coordination with the private owners of critical infrastructure, such as power, communications, and other sectors has continued to improve as a result of the lessons learned from the Derecho storm.
- We have used UASI and other grant funding to assess 31 acute care hospitals in the National Capital Region and neighboring Virginia counties and to improve the back-up power and water capability at a majority of those facilities.

In summary, the support which Congress has provided has enabled local officials in our area to significantly advance the preparedness of the entire region. Our Regional Emergency Coordination Plan (RECP) and our Strategic Plan for NCR are key products for our success. Our investment in traffic and weather information sharing systems, text alert messaging system to inform the public of emergencies, installation of chemical and biological sensors and cameras in the Metro system, and expansion of a secure fiber-optic data network for local use are all critical improvements we have made because of the support we receive through UASI.

The entire National Capital Region continues to pursue increased capabilities so it can meet the full spectrum of homeland security and emergency management

needs. Your continued direct support to this region is essential for maintaining and continuously improving readiness in the NCR, in recognition that local governments are the major emergency services provider to the 240 federal departments and agencies in the NCR.

I assure you that we will do everything possible to protect our citizens at the local level. We are currently updating our NCR Homeland Security Strategic Plan to insure that we continue to address the most urgent needs of the region in the coming years.

With that said, an issue of considerable concern to local jurisdictions in the region is the future of the Office of National Capital Region Coordination (NCRC), currently housed within the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Recently, FEMA announced plans to reorganize the office's program delivery and communications functions. As the Subcommittee is aware, NCRC was established in Section 882 of the 2003 law that created the Department of Homeland Security. Sec. 882 details the duties of this important office, for which the Council of Governments was a very strong advocate over a decade ago. Of critical importance to us is a very high level presence here in the NCR that can insure emergency preparedness, communication and coordination among the 240 federal agencies in the NCR, and with local, state and other regional partners.

We understand that FEMA has agreed to put its recently proposed reorganization plan on hold in order to receive input from regional partners. We look forward to this opportunity to work together to develop the best design for NCRC to meet the needs of the NCR, consistent with the purpose and intent of Section 882.

In closing, I would like to emphasize again that because of the planning, coordination, and exercises we have sponsored, as well as our cooperation with federal, state, and community partners, the National Capital Region is significantly better prepared for the next emergency and all other threats and hazards that might come our way. We are constantly learning, revising, and updating our plans, processes and procedures based on actual emergency situations.

I will be pleased to answer any questions you might have.

###