

**Statement of
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**Before the
Senate Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce
and the District of Columbia**

On:

“The Role of Federal Executive Boards in Pandemic Preparedness”

September 28, 2007

Good morning Chairman Akaka and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the role of Federal Executive Boards in Pandemic Preparedness.

My name is Kimberly Ainsworth. I am an employee of the Environmental Protection Agency New England Region and am assigned to a long-term detail as Executive Director of the Greater Boston Federal Executive Board. I am here today in my capacity as Executive Director of the Greater Boston Federal Executive Board. I have held this position for 11 years.

In this role, I have primary responsibility for the coordination and implementation of all programs and activities under our two lines of business:

- 1.) Human Capital Readiness
- 2.) Emergency Preparedness, Employee Safety and Security

Federal Executive Boards have played an important role in emergency planning and response in many different ways since created in 1961. Today, I would like to provide examples of how Boston and others have contributed to the Federal workforce’s overall readiness and response in meaningful ways and outline our vision for the future, including our pandemic preparedness efforts.

BACKGROUND

The United States Government is the Nation’s largest employer, and among the top five employers in many metropolitan areas across our Country, including Massachusetts. During emergencies, it is the Federal workforce’s responsibility to collaborate and act uniformly as one government to ensure the safety of our employees and customers. To that end, Federal Executive Boards play a vital role from a workforce planning perspective.

Although Federal Executive Boards are not first responders, emergency managers, or law enforcement professionals, we can and do play an important role in public safety. Federal Executive Boards are in a position to provide crucial communication links among Federal agencies, and State and local officials, alike. We ensure that Agency leaders are provided with

accurate, up-to-date and consistent information from local subject matter experts in order to make informed decisions.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Boston is the hub city for the New England Region. Most agency officials have responsibilities across the six New England States and many expand to New York, New Jersey and other areas along the Northeast.

More than 180 Federal agencies maintain a presence in Massachusetts. According to the most recent US Census statistics, there are approximately 78,000 civilian employees, 3000 active duty members of our Armed Forces and 17,000 Postal employees across our State. These numbers do not include contractors, consultants and grantees. (See attached: The Federal Workforce's Impact on Massachusetts: A Socio-Economic Report)

COLLABORATION

Although each Federal agency is responsible for the safety of its employees and the Continuity of Operations, Federal Executive Boards complement their efforts by facilitating collaboration on many different levels. This is extremely important as, according to the US Office of Personnel Management, more than 84 percent of the 1.5 million-person Federal workforce works outside of Washington, DC. Collectively, our goal is to ensure the safety and security of Federal employees and our customers while also ensuring that the essential business of government continues.

Although each Federal agency has its own mission and goals, there are many issues where collaboration is important, including during emergency preparedness, response and recovery. Further, although most Federal agencies have close working relationships with the State and local counterparts from a program standpoint, the Federal Executive Board strives to maintain working relationships with key State and local decision-makers, including the Governor's emergency management staff, for workforce planning issues.

BOSTON'S EXPERIENCE

Our experiences in Boston prior to 2001 focused primarily on weather-related events. The Federal Executive Board maintained an Emergency Weather Committee to collect data from subject-matter experts (*i.e.* the National Weather Service and Federal police) and coordinated information sharing among our agencies. The committee made recommendations to Federal decision-makers during extreme weather events. However, in the post 9-11 environment, our member agencies have greater needs and expectations of us. Our emergency preparedness role has expanded and our procedures have evolved.

Like most, we learned a lot from the events of September 11, 2001 and the days and weeks that followed.

And, the anthrax attacks that followed were troubling for everyone, especially Federal workers.

Federal employees everywhere banded together to ensure that the essential business of government continued. That said, many, including Federal employees, experienced an increased need for stress management and other employee assistance programs. Additionally, Federal employees sought out information about anthrax and how to protect themselves and identify potential threats. Federal Executive Boards responded to these needs and quickly engaged local Federal partners, such as the US Department of Health and Human Services and the US Postal Inspection Service, to offer government-wide seminars and other educational forums quickly and at no cost.

In 2002, Boston built on these lessons and unveiled the first-of-its kind comprehensive *Emergency Decision and Notification Plan*. Developed by an interdisciplinary Work Group, it outlines an all-hazards approach to emergency preparedness, response and recovery from a workforce planning perspective for our Federal community, including a pandemic. Potential hazards include local and national manmade and natural disasters as well as widespread civil unrest and shelter-in-place. (See attached Greater Boston Federal Executive Board Emergency Decision and Notification Plan.)

As part of this Plan, the Federal Executive Board collected 24/7/365 contact information for our local Federal agency decision-makers, and at least one back-up. A variety of communication strategies were designed to ensure widespread dissemination of accurate, up-to-date and consistent information around the clock. Mechanisms included email distribution lists, most commonly used during business hours, an internet web portal and an electronic telephone communications system.

(Of special note is that recently, with help from the FBI, Federal Executive Boards nationwide were granted access to Law Enforcement On-Line (www.leo.gov) and United States Public and Private Partnership (usp3.org.) All 28 Federal Executive Boards can utilize a uniform communication mechanism that will surely improve our capabilities. Prior to this system, FEBs operated independently and usually relied on local agencies for their communication needs. This often caused delays and confusion. The USP3 effort was spearheaded by the Dallas-Fort Worth Federal Executive Board, in cooperation with the Dallas FBI office, who saw a mutual benefit to expanding this interagency communication pilot program nationwide.)

Boston's Emergency Decision and Notification Plan has been enacted and tested on several occasions since its launch. Our experiences have taught us that there is a significant service that the Federal Executive Board provides to our members during what I call perceived emergencies.

For example, we learned a lot during the Democratic National Convention that took place in Boston in July 2004. It was to be the first National political convention since the 2001 terrorist attacks and the event was designated as a National Special Security Event (NSSE) in May 2003. An NSSE is defined as "an event or gathering of national significance; a potential terrorist target that requires Federal counter-terrorism capabilities." (See attached *After Action Report*.)

An event of this National stature was expected to draw protest organizations both organized and ad hoc. Organizations were rumored to be planning for civil disobedience and the increased security measures, which included major road closures, could be disruptive in the community.

The Federal Executive Board represented the interests of the Federal workforce during the year-long security planning and also during the event itself. Although the event experienced no real threats or disruptions, there were several cases where rumor and innuendo threatened public safety. For example, on the evening before the opening ceremonies, when many high-profile political leaders, delegates and families had descended upon the city, local media reported that a small aircraft had been seen entering the secure airspace over the event venue, which was in direct proximity to a major Federal building, and that someone had parachuted out of it and evaded security. Citizens and employees were already anxious and this report added to their anxiety.

The Federal Executive Board stepped in during the late evening hours and coordinated the collection of real-time information from subject-matter experts within our Federal law enforcement community. We were able to quickly disseminate facts and recommendations from the public safety community. This decreased the anxiety and provided local Federal agency leaders with accurate, consistent and up-to-date information to make decisions impacting the safety of the Federal workplace and ensured that the essential business of government continued.

We have since shared our After Action report, chronicling our year-long experience, with the US Office of Personnel Management, and both Denver and Minnesota, respectively, in preparation for the National conventions in 2008.

On January 25, 2005, local media outlets reported that a group of Chinese terrorists had issued a specific and imminent threat to the Greater Boston area. Several were reporting from outside Federal sites, including local FBI offices and the Federal courthouses. (See attached article *FBI finds terror threat was fabricated*. January 26, 2005 Boston Globe)

Once again, the Federal Executive Board was able to quickly collect and share real-time information. Because it was during business hours, we were able to invite local Federal decision-makers to participate in an on-line discussion with the Federal Protective Service's (FPS) Regional Director who helped dispel rumors and outlined FPS' heightened alert measures. As a result, Federal managers were able to alleviate the fears of their employees and get back to work.

Later that year, we employed similar procedures, when, on July 7, 2005, Americans awoke to reports of a series of coordinated terrorist bomb blasts that hit London's transportation system during their morning rush hour. At 9:30am on that same day, in downtown Boston, two underground subway trains were involved in a minor collision. Already on high alert and not yet knowing the nature of the accident, dozens of police and fire personnel, and the Massachusetts State Police Casualty Unit, responded.

Although local public safety officials were quick to determine that there was no link to the London events, an intense flow of misinformation circulated quickly. Federal managers

grappled with determining what course of action was in the best interests of their workforce. The Federal Executive Board was called into action to coordinate information-sharing. (See attached *Accident on Green Line leaves 3 injured July 8, 2005* The Boston Globe)

Lastly, and most recently, on January 31, 2007, Boston made headlines nationwide when a marketing scheme went wrong. During the morning rush hour, a total of 38 electronic devices, resembling “lite brite” toys, were placed in public locations around Greater Boston, including on bridges and in subway stations, to promote a movie. The suspicious devices sent public safety officials scrambling for many hours. Member agencies relied on the Federal Executive Board to collect and disseminate up-to-date, accurate and consistent information as the situation unfolded. (See attached “*Aqua Teen*” *Incident Begs Question: Have We Become Too Paranoid?* February 1, 2007 MTV Press)

Although these examples are specific to Boston, I can tell you that Federal Executive Boards nationwide all have similar stories. From information-sharing during large civic rallies to extreme weather events, Federal Executive Boards play a vital role in ensuring the safety of the Federal workforce and its customers. I believe that this information-sharing and communication role will be increasingly important during a pandemic, particularly given the likelihood of its extended timeframe and a widespread national impact.

TABLETOP EXERCISES, TRAINING AND OTHER NEEDS

Federal Executive Boards nationwide have been hosting interagency tabletop exercises featuring a host of scenarios, including a pandemic, for many years.

Minnesota led the way and developed a pandemic exercise that many of us have emulated. In Boston, more than 100 Federal agencies participated and the lessons learned spurred two additional educational forums, focusing on telework and workplace violence, respectively. Almost all Federal Executive Boards host Continuity of Operations (COOP) Working Groups or Emergency Planning Councils to provide technical assistance, training and education on a variety of COOP and emergency preparedness-related topics to Federal COOP and emergency planners. Most include State and local representatives.

Federal Executive Boards have the ability to fill gaps that currently exist. For example, Detroit hosted FEMA’s COOP Training for the first time 3 years ago. They followed up with a pandemic tabletop exercise, a COOP Train-the-Trainer program, and then, just last week hosted a second pandemic exercise. Each had a significant interagency presence and assisted the Federal community at large with its individual planning efforts.

Honolulu-Pacific has made strides in relationship-building and is actively engaged with their State’s Civil Defense component, representing their large Federal workforce. They’ve sponsored a variety of planning forums on emergency, health and safety issues.

Tragically, on April 19, 1995, with the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building, the newly created Oklahoma Federal Executive Board was placed on the forefront of this issue and demonstrated the Federal Executive Board’s essential role in being there to assist the Federal

workforce in their time of need. They not only coordinated relief efforts for Federal workers and their families but also served as the liaison with the US Office of Personnel Management and other Administration officials on a myriad of issues, including pay and leave. These efforts continued years later when trials were held and with the execution of Timothy McVeigh. Oklahoma has also had its fair share of weather-related events in recent years, including devastating tornadoes.

Although we hope to never again be needed to assist in with the aftermath of tragic events such as September 11 or the Oklahoma City Bombing, the fact the Federal Executive Board's exist and have these extensive intergovernmental networks in place as well as the ability to disseminate essential information quickly, is a tremendous asset to the Federal workforce.

CHALLENGES

Federal Executive Boards continue be effective in this regard while overcoming recurring challenges. Many were captured in the May 2007 Government Accountability Office Report and, as reported, are being addressed by the US Office of Personnel Management, FEMA and our numerous funding agencies. The first step was the development of the business plan, which includes two lines of business. These have, in a short time, helped Federal Executive Board gain the attention or policymakers and increased credibility in their communities.

For example, Boston is currently a one-person office. Although historically we have received adequate support from our funding agency and member agencies, our ability to continue to provide 24/7/365 communication is questionable given our current staffing. Further, many Boston members are active with other Federal Executive Boards within their geographic area of responsibility, including New York and Newark. Members have an expectation that each of us will provide a uniform level of service and that is not always the case due to our varying resources. Further, currently, there is no correlation between the size of the Federal community, the complexity of the community served and the resources available to the resources of the area Federal Executive Board. Federal Executive Boards are not uniform in size and scope. Several, including Minnesota, New Mexico, Oregon and Oklahoma, are statewide where others cover a smaller, defined metropolitan area.

Lastly, Federal Executive Board staff has not yet been formally designated as "emergency personnel" and position descriptions and supervisory control vary depending on the funding agency's internal controls. Executive Director Positions vary between GS 12 to GS 14, or equivalent. This discrepancy in grade level presents its own set of challenges as the lines of business evolve and the role changes. Security clearance levels, which also vary dramatically, are likely to become an issue as the emergency preparedness, employee safety and security line of business evolves.

CLOSING:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Subcommittee members, for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am pleased to answer any question that you might have.

REFERENCES / ATTACHMENTS

I. ARTICLES

FBI finds terror threat was fabricated. January 26, 2005 Boston Globe
http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2005/01/26/fbi_finds_terror_threat_wa_s_fabricated/

Accident on Green Line leaves 3 injured July 8, 2005 The Boston Globe
http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles/2005/07/08/accident_on_green_line_leaves_3_injured/

“Aqua Teen” Incident Begs Question: Have We Become Too Paranoid? February 1, 2007
<http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1551347/20070201/index.jhtml>

II. REPORTS

Greater Boston Federal Executive Board Emergency Decision and Notification Plan
<http://www.boston.feb.gov/emergency.asp>

Greater Boston Federal Executive Board After Action Report: July 2004
“Workforce Planning for the 2004 Democratic National Convention: A National Special Security Event”

The Federal Workforce’s Impact on Massachusetts: A Socio-Economic Report August 2007
<http://www.boston.feb.gov/report.asp>

Greater Boston Federal Executive Board Work Plan for 2007 December 21, 2006
<http://www.boston.feb.gov/report.asp>