

**RANKING MEMBER LAURA RICHARDSON (D-CA)**  
**OPENING STATEMENT**

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**“Five Years Later: An Assessment of the Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act”**

**October 25, 2011 at 10:00 AM**  
**311 Cannon House Office Building**

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I would like to thank Chairman Bilirakis for convening this hearing to evaluate FEMA’s progress in implementing the mandates of the Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act (PKEMRA).

I would also like to thank Administrator Fugate for appearing before the Subcommittee today. I look forward to hearing your assessment of FEMA’s present ability to manage effective emergency preparedness and response efforts.

We are here today because just over six years ago, Hurricane Katrina ravaged the gulf coast and was a sobering test of our comprehensive emergency management system.

FEMA failed that test. The federal government was ill-equipped to manage disaster recovery and response activities.

No one knew who was in charge, who should be coordinating federal, state, and local response efforts, what resources were available, or how to acquire needed supplies efficiently.

The Mayor of New Orleans, the Governor of Louisiana and the FEMA Administrator pointed fingers and placed blame.

In the meantime, a nation watched television coverage of this horrific disaster.

Television news crews were able to get to the scene but relief supplies were not.

In response, Congress enacted the Post Katrina Emergency Reform Act. Although the bill was not perfect, it made much needed changes to our emergency response infrastructure.

Notably, it streamlined emergency preparedness and response operations by consolidating all components of the comprehensive emergency management system into the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

It established a clear chain of command for disaster response activities by giving a Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO) statutory authority to head disaster response coordination.

It directed FEMA to administer grants and guidance to state and local governments to improve their preparedness capabilities.

And, it established ten regional offices charged with coordinating with state and local governments and non-governmental organizations to develop effective regional disaster preparedness and response plans.

The Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act directed the Administrator to appoint a Disability Coordinator to ensure that vulnerable populations have access to, and knowledge of, means to evacuate, emergency housing, and other necessary resources in the event of a major disaster.

Under Administrator Fugate's leadership, FEMA has made progress in implementing the Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act's directives.

For example, FEMA has taken significant steps in implementing an Integrated Public Alert and Warning System, which will facilitate effective public warnings regarding future disaster. These warnings will give people the opportunity to seek safe shelter in the wake of a major disaster.

Despite the progress, five years after enactment of the Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act, significant gaps remain in our comprehensive emergency response system.

I am concerned that a combination of budget cuts and other obstacles will hinder our ability to realize our preparedness goals.

For example, another issue of particular importance to me, and one that I will address again later in my questions, is whether the Disability Coordinator has adequate resources to carry out its responsibilities under the Act.

As most of us here today know, Administrator Fugate appointed a Disability Coordinator in June 2009.

However, in FY2011, the office of the Disability Coordinator had a budget of just \$150,000.

There was no request for additional funding in the FY 2012 budget request.

I am concerned this budgetary amount may be the clearest sign of the priority FEMA places on the mission of this office.

I will be interested to hear Administrator Fugate's comments on this issue and others as the hearing progresses.