

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Donald Payne, Jr. (D-NJ)

Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications

“STAKEHOLDER ASSESSMENTS OF THE ADMINISTRATION’S NATIONAL PREPAREDNESS GRANT PROGRAM PROPOSAL”

Tuesday, April 29, 2014

I want to thank Chairwoman Brooks for holding this hearing and giving Homeland Security Grant Program stakeholders the opportunity to share their thoughts on the Administration’s proposal to consolidate targeted homeland security grant programs.

I would like to take a brief moment to share my sympathies with the people who were in the path of the storms and tornadoes that wreaked havoc on parts of the Great Plains and the south over the past few days.

My thoughts are especially with families who lost their loved ones or homes or businesses.

Since serving as Ranking Member of this Subcommittee, this committee has tried on numerous occasions to understand the Administration’s proposal to consolidate homeland security grants.

The Administration first proposed the National Preparedness Grant Program (NPGP) in its FY 2013 budget request.

At the time, the proposal surprised Members of Congress and stakeholders alike, because FEMA had not conducted outreach prior to the budget submission.

In response, this panel held hearings to try to learn more about the NPGP.

Stakeholder groups expressed frustration that they were left out of the process, concern about how NPGP would affect local preparedness capabilities, and confusion about how NPGP would be administered.

FEMA provided a general overview of how NPGP would work, and suggested that more detail would be provided in the legislative proposal.

Members of this panel were told that they could expect the legislative language “soon.”

FEMA never submitted the legislative language, and Congress ultimately rejected the proposal.

In FY 2014, FEMA once again proposed to consolidate homeland security grants into the NPGP.

But it still had not submitted the legislative proposal, nor did it appear that it had made an appreciable effort to work with stakeholders on a grant reform proposal that both sides could support.

As a result, Congress rejected the proposal a second time.

I know that Members of this panel, on both sides of the aisle, had hoped that the proposal this year would be different.

Unfortunately, many of the concerns this Committee has raised in the past have not been resolved.

FEMA deserves some credit for submitting a legislative proposal this year.

I also appreciate FEMA's effort to provide more detail on how NPGP would work in the letter it sent to the Committee on Friday. FEMA's letter was timely and informative.

That said, the legislative proposal does not reflect the interaction with stakeholders, clarity of vision, or detail that I would have expected for a document nearly three years in the making.

Moreover, despite the additional detail in the April 25th letter, I do not think that it made the case to overhaul homeland security grants, particularly when so many stakeholders have raised concerns.

Further, despite Congress' urging, it does not appear that FEMA engaged with stakeholders in the manner Congress envisioned.

When this panel urged FEMA to work with stakeholders as it continued to work on its grant consolidation proposal, we had hoped that the dialogue would be ongoing and that stakeholders would see their comments reflected in the updated consolidation proposal.

But that does not appear to be the case.

For example, I understand that the new definition of "local unit of government" included in the legislative proposal caused a great deal of concern among stakeholders, and that these concerns were expressed to FEMA prior to the FY 2015 budget submission.

Yet, the new definition of "local unit of government" remains in the Administration's proposal.

The proposal would divert the current grant program's focus on terrorism to all-hazards, without making the case for why this is appropriate.

Toward that end, I am particularly concerned that the proposal would eliminate the requirement that 25 percent of State and Urban Area grant dollars fund law enforcement terrorism initiatives.

Finally, I am concerned by the funding level sought, and am interested to learn whether this level of funding is sufficient to maintain and develop the capabilities necessary to prepare for and respond to acts of terror.

I look forward to learning from the witnesses how the existing grant program has improved State and local homeland security capabilities, and how those capabilities would be impacted by the proposal.

I am also interested to know whether the stakeholders here today have any concerns about homeland security grants as they are currently administered, and ideas to improve them.