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Improving the Federal Response: Perspectives on the State of Emergency Management

Good afternoon Chairman Payne, Ranking Member King, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. It is an honor to speak on behalf of the many dedicated professionals at the New Jersey State Police (NJSP), and on behalf of Colonel Patrick J. Callahan, who also serves as the State Director of Emergency Management. I am Major Louis Bucchere, Commanding Officer of the Emergency Management Section, which is also known as the *New Jersey Office of Emergency Management* (NJOEM).

NJOEM is co-located with our State Police Office of the Regional Operations and Intelligence Center at the State's fusion center, which allows for seamless information sharing and cooperation between the emergency management and intelligence functions. The State plans for all hazards and all threats.

In the aftermath of Sandy which displaced some coastal residents for years, NJOEM's objective has been to enhance the State's internal capacity to manage large-scale incidents. We accomplish this with the support of federal grants and equipment, and by:

- leveraging relationships;
- supporting the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC);
- increasing our cadre of trained emergency management professionals; and
- enhancing community preparedness.

Partnerships

NJOEM facilitates regular meetings with emergency management staff from key State agencies, non-profit and volunteer groups, county emergency management offices, and federal agencies. This group is the cornerstone of our emergency management program. In addition, we work directly with county emergency management offices, and also collaborate with the private sector. We also maintain a critical partnership with the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness to enhance preparedness, prevention, and response efforts for terrorist attacks and cyber incidents.

NJOEM also leverages task forces to address concerns for the State, such as sheltering, evacuation, and opioid use. New Jersey's Task Force One (NJ-TF1) has been deployed several times since qualifying as a FEMA Urban Search & Rescue Team, and provides local search and rescue assistance in the State.

Four members of the FEMA Integration Team are assigned to work with NJOEM to provide assistance with planning for sheltering, housing, mitigation, and Community Emergency Response Teams. We are appreciative of their support.

EMAC

New Jersey actively participates in the Emergency Management Assistance Compact. Recently, New Jersey supported the deployment of personnel to the US Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, California, and Hawaii. In 2017 alone, New Jersey deployed over 800 personnel to EMAC missions. The State also deployed critical assets, including industrial generators to Georgia, and a mobile field hospital to the Virgin Islands. Our deployed first responders use their skills and bring back best practices to NJ, and fortify relationships with other states.

However, EMAC deployments involve a significant financial outlay, and the reimbursement process is time consuming. In New Jersey's case, reimbursement of several million dollars from 2017 is still outstanding. While EMAC is a state to state agreement, all parties, including the federal government, would benefit from a streamlined reimbursement process.

Workforce

NJOEM strives to have the best-trained emergency management staff at all levels within the State. Like many other states, we face several challenges in meeting emergency management workforce needs. One of our primary challenges is that staffing is budgeted for "blue sky" days. However, we must scale up operations significantly to meet the requirements of "gray sky" incidents while still maintaining all critical functions. Additional challenges exist at the local level, where emergency managers are often part-time employees or volunteers.

We meet these challenges through training and workforce certification, and the use of added contract staff. NJOEM maintains a full-time training unit and has been approved by FEMA to conduct advanced training in our home state.

The State recently formed the New Jersey All-Hazards Incident Management Team (NJ-AHIMT) to increase our capacity for incident management support. The team is composed of members from State and local agencies, as well as non-profits. The team has already distinguished itself during its deployment to Georgia for Hurricane Michael.

Community Preparedness

Individual preparedness is an ongoing focus and a challenge. We collaborate with partners across the State to disseminate and amplify preparedness information. The State has developed training to promote preparedness for individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs (DAFN). The State is also assisting the counties with incorporating the DAFN community in emergency response planning and preparedness.

To meet the challenge of individual and family preparedness, the NJOEM Public Information Office works in conjunction with partner agencies to ensure clear, consistent public messaging. NJOEM has built a large social media following with a strong brand that the State's residents have come to know and trust.

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The reality is that effective emergency management requires a commitment from all stakeholders and the community. I believe that New Jersey continues with forward momentum in these areas, and is on the path to achieve its emergency management objectives. With continued federal support, New Jersey can be more self-reliant and able to render assistance to other states and territories. I thank you for this opportunity to testify before this sub-committee.