

STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE THE

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UNITED STATES SENATE

“CHILDREN AND DISASTERS:
A PROGRESS REPORT ON ADDRESSING NEEDS”

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Introduction

Good morning Chairwoman Landrieu, Ranking Member Graham and other distinguished members of the Subcommittee. It is a privilege to appear before you today on behalf of FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security. I appreciate the opportunity to testify at this hearing, as I firmly believe that we, as a nation, must do more to effectively meet the critical needs of children who are affected by disasters.

Historically, the United States has approached disaster planning by focusing heavily on the needs of what many refer to as the general adult population, and has not devoted sufficient advance attention to those who may have unique needs and thus require specific and immediate attention in a crisis- such as children, the disabled and the elderly. As a result, our nation's ability to respond effectively in support of children's needs following a disaster has been hampered. With the continued support of this Committee and the Congress, we will work to change this approach and ensure that all members of our communities, particularly children, are adequately and appropriately provided for in all planning, response and recovery efforts.

In December 2007, Congress created the National Commission on Children and Disasters to assess how the needs of children impact disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. The Commission has evaluated existing laws, regulations, policies, and programs that affect children in disaster situations, and has been charged with submitting a report to the President and Congress on its specific findings, conclusions and recommendations. An Interim Report was completed earlier this fall and will be followed by a Final Report in 2010.

When I last appeared before this Committee to discuss children's issues, I announced my intention to create a Children's Working Group at FEMA. The Working Group was established in August of this year and serves as FEMA's internal working team responsible for ensuring that the unique needs of children are addressed and integrated into all disaster planning and operational efforts initiated at the federal level. The team is comprised of a Chairperson, a Lead Coordinator, and representatives from virtually all sectors of FEMA. Tracy Wareing, Counselor to Secretary Janet Napolitano, chairs the Working Group. It is the goal of the Children's Working Group to help create a lasting positive change, at every level of government, when it comes to planning for and successfully addressing children's needs in times of disaster.

The Working Group is designed to provide a centralized forum that facilitates improved coordination across FEMA in addressing the needs of children following a disaster. This group is also working collaboratively with other federal agencies and non-governmental stakeholders, including the National Commission on Children and Disasters, with which it has a close partnership.

The Commission's Interim Report, issued in mid October, makes eleven overall recommendations for improving the nation's ability to support the needs of children in a disaster. Working with the Commission, we are already addressing and implementing

many of those recommendations.

Disaster Case Management

The Commission recommended the establishment of a holistic federal disaster case management program with an emphasis on achieving tangible positive outcomes for all children and families within a presidentially-declared disaster area. Toward this end, we have worked closely with the Department of Health and Human Services and its Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to develop an Interagency Agreement that will provide for the immediate deployment of the ACF holistic disaster case management model when requested by a state following a disaster declaration. The ACF model involves deployment of the ACF National Team to initiate Disaster Case Management services to clients in the impacted area within 72 hours of notification by FEMA and will provide disaster case management services to individuals and households to assess unmet disaster-related needs including healthcare, mental health and human services needs that may adversely impact an individual's recovery if not addressed. The ACF model ensures that case managers facilitate the delivery of appropriate resources and services, work with the client to implement a recovery plan and advocate for the client's needs to assist him or her in returning to their pre-disaster status while respecting human dignity. The agreement also identifies and provides for a transition to a State-administered program to address longer term needs.

The agreement will allow FEMA to provide funding for ACF to initiate the rapid deployment of disaster case management assistance to individuals and families impacted by a presidentially declared disaster for Individual Assistance. FEMA and ACF worked together to ensure that the agreement incorporates lessons learned and best practices from previous disaster case management delivery models and will offer comprehensive services for disaster survivors, and a flexible model that can easily be adapted by state, local, non-governmental and volunteer organization service providers.

This is an important milestone in addressing the needs of children in disasters and we are grateful to the Commission for its work in assisting FEMA and the Department of Health and Human Services.

Disaster Management and Recovery

The Commission made the following recommendations regarding disaster management and recovery issues: (1) distinguish and comprehensively integrate the needs of children across all inter- and intra-governmental disaster planning activities and operations and (2) accelerate the development of a National Disaster Recovery Strategy with an explicit emphasis on addressing the immediate and long-term physical and mental health, educational, housing and human services recovery needs of children. We have already taken several steps towards addressing these issues.

At FEMA, we have begun a review of our base planning guidance, and in consultation with the Commission, we will work to ensure that the needs of children are addressed universally as a basic planning consideration. FEMA is committed to fully integrating

the needs of all children, including children with disabilities, in all aspects of emergency planning and disaster response and recovery, rather than as a secondary, supplemental or special effort. In FY10 guidance for HSGP, FEMA emphasized the importance of incorporating children's needs in preparedness and planning activities. Among other things, the HSGP guidance encourages funds to be used for planning activities associated with the health, safety, education, and care of infants and children, and invites grantees to integrate the needs of infants and children into their base plans rather than independently within the special needs framework. The HSGP guidance also supports training for volunteers, infants, and children in disasters, provides for pediatric care, and addresses evacuation and sheltering requirements with a particular emphasis on children.

In September, President Obama asked Secretary Napolitano and Department of Housing and Urban Development Secretary Shaun Donovan to co-chair a Long Term Disaster Recovery (LTDR) Working Group. This Working Group includes representatives from more than 20 federal departments, agencies and offices, and its charge, in partnership with stakeholders at all levels, is to provide the President with recommendations on how to improve long term disaster recovery for communities and individuals.

The LTDR Working Group has already held more than 10 joint, DHS-FEMA /HUD video teleconferences in each of the FEMA/HUD regions as well as 5 regional stakeholder forums around the country. We have sought broad participation, from children's advocacy groups, non-profit organizations and disaster survivors. The Working Group is working directly with the Commission to ensure their input is also heard.

Based upon these forums, and solicitation of input through the web site, the Long Term Disaster Recovery Working Group will provide the President with recommendations to improve long-term disaster recovery, particularly in the wake of catastrophic events. In addition, by June 1, 2010 a National Disaster Recovery Framework will be published that will provide detailed operational guidance to recovery organizations under existing authorities.

Child Care and Sheltering

The Commission made several recommendations with respect to reimbursement of costs related to child care facilities and services. In response to those recommendations, FEMA has clarified its reimbursement rules in a presidentially-declared disaster as outlined below:

Emergency Sheltering. The Stafford Act authorizes funding for emergency sheltering following a declared disaster. If a state or local government provides child care services to families that are in shelters, the cost to provide the child care services are considered a part of the sheltering operations and are eligible for Stafford Act funding. In addition, FEMA may reimburse a state and local government for the cost to establish and operate stand-alone day care centers as emergency shelter for a limited time immediately after a disaster.

Temporary Facilities. The Stafford Act authorizes the provision of temporary

facilities for schools and other essential community services. FEMA has determined that the provision of day care services is an essential community service. As such, if an eligible applicant (public or private non profit facility) operated a child care facility prior to the disaster and the facility was damaged, the cost of obtaining temporary facilities until the damaged facility is repaired is a reimbursable cost.

Repair, Restoration or Replacement of Public and Private Non Profit Facilities. The Stafford Act allows for funding the repair, restoration or replacement of damaged public and private nonprofit facilities that provide essential services of a governmental nature. FEMA has interpreted this category of services to include child care centers and will revise its Public Assistance regulations to specifically include child care centers for children as an *essential service of a governmental nature*.

The Stafford Act does require that private, non profit day care centers apply for Small Business Administration loans before applying to FEMA for assistance to repair facilities. If SBA does not approve the private nonprofit operator's loan or approves a loan for less than the amount required for repair, the operator may apply to FEMA for assistance with the difference.

Our Children's Working Group also collaborated with the Commission, the American Red Cross and other pediatric experts to develop a Shelter Supply List identifying the basic items necessary to sustain infants and children in a mass care shelter and emergency congregate care environment. Some items that appear on the Shelter Supply List have been incorporated as allowable expenses into the FY2010 Homeland Security Grant Program guidance mentioned above. Their inclusion depicts the results of a unified collaboration between the Federal government and external stakeholders. Further, I have directed FEMA's Logistics Management Directorate to develop a plan to address critical needs, according to the Shelter Supply List, by identifying suppliers, pricing supplies and developing plans to procure and deliver necessary items to communities in need following a request associated with a disaster declaration.

Conclusion

In times of crisis, government plays a critical role in coordinating response and recovery efforts, especially in protecting and providing for the most vulnerable members of our population. The needs of children and other members of our communities with special access and functional needs cannot simply fall to secondary planning considerations, but must be one of the central focuses of our planning, response and recovery.

While we have made recent strides to improve our ability to address children's needs in disasters, we believe that even greater progress is within reach, thanks to our new Children's Working Group, its partnership with the Commission, and the continued support of this Committee and the Congress.

Above all, our efforts must begin with personal preparedness – basic steps that each of us, and our families, must take to help prevent and prepare for the next disaster.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman and members of the Committee, for allowing me to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.