

Prepared Statement of Robert J. Warren

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Good morning.

The Governor and General Bray have spoken of the many initiatives that have been and are on going within the State. As the Executive Director of the Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency I am in contact with the local and federal partners that the State interacts with on a daily basis. As such my remarks today will address not only issues that affect Rhode Island but also those that I feel are important to maintain the unique relationship we enjoy with those partners.

Being the Ocean State, all Rhode Islanders recognize the value and fragility of Narragansett Bay. This resource is also one of my biggest concerns. The population that now lives or earns a living from the bay has increased tremendously in recent years. Yet, our latest inundation studies of the bay were done in 1993. Congress must give the Army Corps of Engineers and other agencies which perform these types of studies the appropriate level of funding to maintain effective programs. Responders and more importantly our municipal planners cannot accurately predict and prevent damage without current and up to date data. Funding for these programs will help prevent disasters from

future storms. Congress must make every effort to maintain these programs even though the benefit may seem to be in distance years.

The past six months have been the most active that I can remember in my public safety career. The lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina have caused us to re-exam our assumptions and priorities. The plans and programs in place today would not be successful without our federal and local partners. The amount of planning and program requirements flowing down from the federal level is placing a strain on our planning capabilities. As important has planning for hurricanes is none of us can forget that other dangers still exist; terrorism, pandemic flu and our own local hazards cannot be ignored. My agency now is getting planning and exercises guidelines and deadlines for program devolvement from DHS, FEMA, NGB, CDC and NRC with what seem like little coordination or recognition of our resources. Most of my staff is working on several plans simultaneously with conflicting deadlines and schedules. Only two communities in the State have full time emergency management staff. Most are either part time or do the work as a collateral duty. I ask you to take this issue back to Washington on behalf of RIEMA and that of our local partners, who are making every effort to meet the demands I place on them to assist or coordinate with RIEMA.

This issue was also raised at the FEMA regions 1 & 2 conference last week in Albany by the State directors of several emergency management agencies. A recent example is the DHS regional hurricane drill which was scheduled for the same dates as our regional conference with the New England States and Canada.

My last remarks do not imply that we do not have a high level of cooperation with our federal partners. FEMA Region#1 has been more than helpful during my tenure with RIEMA. FEMA had a representative located in our State EOC during the entire week we were planning to receive evacuees from New Orleans and during the flooding we experienced in October. We are using FEMA staff to help rewrite our plan for Resource Management Plan as the General mentioned. Our three military Emergency Preparedness Liaison Officers (Col. Johnson, Col. Brennan, and Capt. Borges-Dubois) have been active and know all my staff. They were also in the Emergency Operations Center in October and routinely attend meetings at RIEMA.

I truly believe that should Rhode Island face an event the magnitude of Katrina our relationship and communications with the various federal government agencies will be an asset not a hindrance.

Another issue that I feel needs to be addressed is the use of Homeland Security funds for multiple disciplines. DHS guidelines in the past have told us what the funds can be used for in any given year. I think that this evaluation needs to be expanded to include areas that of natural or other hazards. For example, one request that continually is received from local government is to use DHS funds for generators for public shelters. This has not been allowed in the past. Local directors feel that this is one of the most basic ways to protect their citizens. These types of expenses need to be allowed by grant requirements.

The response to Katrina was the largest involving mutual in history and we need to examine ways to make this response more efficient and easier for the responding states and local communities. The Emergency Management Aid Compact (EMAC) was used with great success in the last two hurricane seasons. EMAC is a State not federal asset. In all practically the system is usually funded after the Stafford Act is in effect so I feel that congress should take and interest in this valuable aid system. The best way at this point would be to make it easier and quicker for the payment to the responding communities. It is not my intent to lead you to believe system in place does not work or that this is totally a federal issue. It just seems the paperwork between communities and states and then the federal government leaves the local communities or States using their own funds for a longer period of time then should be allowed. As we look at more national mutual aid in the future, I just feel this is an area that needs further examination and innervations.

One specific request that I do have is for some direct funding to Rhode Island for assistance in building a state of the art Emergency Management Center. The Governor has placed before the legislature a request for 20 million dollars to rehab a State owned building for E911, DoIT and RIEMA. If the federal government could contribute another 6 million dollars specifically earmarked for the EOC that would be a great help in giving my staff a suitable center to function during these local and national incidents.

Thank you for allowing me to appear before you this morning on these important issues.