



**Statement of
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**Before the
United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental
Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal
Workforce, and the District of Columbia**

**Hearing Title:
*“How prepared is the National Capital Region for the next disaster?”***

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2:00 p.m.**

**Dirksen Senate Office Building
Room 342**

Good afternoon Chairman Begich, Ranking Member Paul, and Subcommittee Members. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss incident response coordination within the National Capital Region (NCR), and how we work with public and private partners at all levels of government to enhance regional preparedness. Specifically, I will discuss our unique character both as the Nation's Capital for hundreds of thousands of federal employees, a hub for mass events like marathons, demonstrations, ceremonies and presidential inaugurations, and a major target for man-made and natural hazards. I appreciate the opportunity to highlight the critical nature of special event planning and regional coordination in preparedness and response.

National Capital Region Coordination

Pre-Incident Coordination

I would like to add some context to the District of Columbia's unique role within the NCR. The District is 68 square miles and home to approximately 632,000 residents. It is a destination for 17 million visitors annually, the center of all three branches of government, and headquarters to 12 out of the 15 executive cabinet-level federal agencies.

The District of Columbia hosts a plethora of special events every year, and each is subject to a full and individual preparedness and response effort. This constant special event planning effort is so large that it requires a designated coordinating body, led by the District of Columbia Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency (HSEMA). I chair the Mayor's Special Events Task Group, which brings together all District public safety entities and relevant federal agencies to address public safety and other logistical concerns surrounding special events.

Annually, the group coordinates over 100 special events, including presidential inaugurations. More than 800,000 people attended the 2013 Presidential Inauguration and in 2009, the 1.2 million attendees set a record for the largest attendance of any event in Washington, D.C.'s history; it was also the largest attended presidential inauguration in United States history.

We also know very well the kind of public safety planning that goes into marathon events, like the Boston Marathon. The District hosts multiple races each year – including the Marine Corps Marathon, the Nike Women's Half Marathon, and the Nation's Triathlon. Respectively, each year, these events draw approximately 23,000, 15,000, and 5,000 participants and tens of thousands of spectators. In addition, the District of Columbia is a regular destination for organized mass gatherings that can draw hundreds of thousands of attendees.

In addition to our unique character as a special events hub, the District of Columbia is a nucleus for federal employees – more than 300,000 federal employees work in the District every day. This character creates a distinct synergy between the federal government as an employer and the emergency planning and response efforts we do as a city – an evacuation of federal buildings puts thousands of employees on District streets. Because of this synergy, the District of Columbia must maintain close working relationships and a continuous link with federal entities such as the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in order to coordinate information such as government closings, liberal leave, early dismissals, and shelter in place.

In addition to local, state and federal partnerships, pre-incident intelligence is cornerstone to NCR coordination. Intelligence efforts are implemented through four fusion centers - the Washington Regional Threat and Analysis Center, the Maryland Coordination and Analysis Center, the NCR Intelligence Center, and the Virginia Fusion Center. The directors of these fusion centers have regular meetings to share pertinent information, best practices, and joint intelligence products. We closely coordinate joint threat assessments, such as for inauguration planning, the Fourth of July and any special events that warrant collaboration. The region also has a planning program management office where planners come together to share and develop coordinated plans for priorities such as resource management and special needs populations.

Coordinated Incident Response

The District's Joint All Hazards Center, housed at the District of Columbia Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency, is the region's 24/7 emergency operations center that facilitates District and regional situational awareness. Among other things, the Center disseminates emergency communications such as D.C. Alerts and the Regional Incident Communication and Coordination System messages. It also serves as the control point for the Washington Area Warning System.

During an incident, the NCR, through the region's emergency managers, has adopted the Incident Command System (ICS) as a primary means for coordinating responses. All first responders are trained in the National Incident Management System (NIMS), and key personnel that staff the region's emergency operations are further trained in ICS response principles. This

training is conducted through the Urban Area Security Initiative - funded NIMS officers in each jurisdiction.

The region has also developed inherent capabilities for interoperable communications, data and voice, which enables a highly coordinated response among jurisdictions. In addition, the region performs mutual aid operations on a daily basis, and has the means to scale mutual aid for larger disasters through agreements that have been developed through the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOCG). Additionally, the NCR developed capabilities include nine Type 1 Bomb Squads, swift water rescue and hazmat equipment and personnel. The region has also outfitted every firefighter in the NCR with two sets of personal protective equipment.

On the health and medical front, the region has developed the capability to track patients throughout an incident – from initial triage all the way through unification to their families – and to assist in managing hospital bed numbers. The region is also currently working on the ability to link our Computer Aided Dispatch systems, which will reduce response times and streamline mutual aid.

The region has conducted a number of exercises to ensure that these capabilities can perform to standard, including health and medical point of distribution exercises, incident command system drills and functional exercises, and communications training. Recently, HSEMA and the Maryland Emergency Management Agency with FEMA's national Incident Management Assistance Teams conducted a four-day exercise that tested our response capabilities in the event

of a ten kiloton improvised nuclear device (IND) detonation. This exercise required close coordination among regional partners at the state, local and federal level.

As stated, the approximate 300,000 federal employees that work in the District are part of the larger federal workforce that lives and works in the NCR. A critical element of regional coordination is communicating with these hundreds of thousands of employees. In the past, the Office of National Capital Region Coordination (NCRC) has been the entity tasked with coordinating the federal government presence in the regional planning and governance structures of the NCR. Specifically, the office convened the NCR Joint Federal Committee, worked with federal building owner/tenants, and coordinated with OPM on workforce status, situational awareness, and information sharing.

Looking Forward

What I have described is a broad picture of the roles, capabilities and processes employed throughout the NCR for preparedness and response. The other critical component in this effort is the administrative and collaboration management piece. Currently, this component is led by the MWCOG and NCRC, each with distinct yet complementary functions.

MWCOG serves as a convener of the participating NCR governance bodies and the responders that work for them across the region. The MWCOG governance structure consists of an Emergency Preparedness Council (local elected officials, federal officials, and private sector entities), Senior Policy Group (homeland security advisors and emergency management directors from the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia and the Director of NCRC), Chief

Administrative Officers (county leadership from the MWCOG membership), and the Regional Emergency Support Functions (RESFs) (organizations of police chiefs, fire chiefs, public health officials, and others from across the region). MWCOG provides meeting support and program management functions to the RESFs across the region, and its leadership participates with the governance bodies to develop strategic plans, program area focus, and project management for preparedness projects and capability development.

In addition, MWCOG has a key role in providing information sharing coordination during incident response, such as convening conference calls for senior leaders across the region. These calls include the chief administrative officers, as well as the homeland security advisors and emergency management directors from across the region. For example, MWCOG conducts “snow calls” prior to predicted snow storms to allow the region’s leadership to discuss potential action plans and develop a clear regional understanding of response needs. MWCOG is a liaison for these calls – not an agenda-setter or a decision-maker – performing the vital role of convening high-level responders for collaborative action. MWCOG also facilitates the key function of organizing the after-action products that allow the region to learn from coordinated incidents and improve capabilities.

In the past, the NCRC has provided the key connection and coordination point with the “local” federal entities in the NCR – those agencies with buildings and employees within the NCR, which would be affected by a natural or manmade disaster in the region. The NCRC works through the NCR Joint Federal Committee to forward preparedness efforts across the federal workforce and all three branches of government. The Office also has a pivotal role, much like

MWCOG, in coordination during a response. For example, during a number of real world and planned special events, the NCRC director has convened key DHS and FEMA officials with regional homeland security advisors, emergency management directors, governors and mayors to share information and action plans.

The Office has also conducted several senior official exercises involving the Mayor, Governors, and DHS Secretary to ensure that in the initial hours of an event, the NCR's message on critical protective actions and response measures are common across federal, state and local jurisdictions. Though the NCRC has no role in dedicating resources, administering FEMA programs, or controlling assets from the federal government, its coordination role, its understanding of the NCR, and its ability to bring the right people together at the right time is invaluable.

The NCRC's Watch Desk within the National Watch Center is pivotal and singular in providing federal agencies and their emergency operations centers with information from regional operations centers. Without the NCRC, this regional coordination information currently has no other means of dissemination. There exists a federal Concept of Operations that delineates the roles in coordination and notification responsibilities of the NCRC, the National Watch Center, the FEMA Region III, and the DHS National Operations Center for the first six hours of an incident in the NCR. The development of this Concept of Operations was necessary to show the importance of information flow in the Nation's Capital. The ability of the NCRC director to quickly and directly engage the DHS Secretary and the FEMA Administrator at the onset of a

major event in the NCR is critical to ensuring the safety of the federal workforce and the unity of response efforts in the NCR.

Having held regional positions in the NCR for the last decade, and as the current homeland security advisor and emergency management director for the District of Columbia, and the State Administrative Agent for the NCR, I believe that the region has come a long way in producing the capabilities and capacity to effectively prepare for, respond to, and recover from events that could affect our region. Our unique region has formed organizational structures that, though still developing, have enabled a district, a state, a commonwealth and three branches of federal government to plan, train, and respond together in an effective manner.

From an emergency management perspective, the NCR is one of the most challenging regions in the country. The region will continue to have challenges going forward, and as the director of the District of Columbia Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency, I feel confident in the relationships and professionalism of my partners from all levels of government in responding to and meeting those challenges.

Thank you for the opportunity to present my testimony, and I look forward to any questions.