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**Testimony before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Emergency Management,
Intergovernmental Relations, and the District of Columbia: “How Prepared is the National
Capital Region for the Next Disaster?”**

Chairman Begich, Ranking Member Paul, and members of the Subcommittee on Emergency Management, Intergovernmental Relations, and the District of Columbia:

My name is Ken Mallette and I serve as the Executive Director of the Maryland Emergency Management Agency. On behalf of Governor Martin O’Malley, I thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts regarding preparedness and response capabilities in the National Capital Region (NCR) and the challenges of fostering an environment that supports emergency response coordination and information sharing.

There are few – if any – other regions in our nation that understand the challenges of building, maintaining, and coordinating response capabilities across state, local, and federal lines as well as the NCR. In our region, we have two states, the District of Columbia, dozens of local jurisdictions and municipalities, as well as hundreds of federal agencies, facilities, and offices that share a dense network of roadways, transit systems, and utility infrastructure. Our interconnection means that when an emergency occurs in one jurisdiction, it does not take long for the effects to be felt throughout the entire region.

Maryland works every day with our local and regional response partners to strengthen the NCR’s ability to respond to an emergency. I serve on the region’s Senior Policy Group along with the Homeland Security Advisors and the heads of emergency management in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia, as well as the Director of FEMA’s Office of the National Capital Region Coordinator. This group meets regularly to identify gaps in the region’s response capabilities, set targets and goals, review progress made on response capabilities and preparedness initiatives, evaluate their effectiveness, and participate in preparedness exercises.

Additionally, the Senior Policy Group makes funding decisions on homeland security grant programs for the NCR along with the region’s Chief Administrative Officer’s Homeland Security Executive Committee. To help us make these decisions, we rely on the NCR Homeland Security Strategic Plan, which identifies preparedness goals for the region and the target

capabilities that will allow us to achieve these goals. Members from both of these groups participate in the region's Emergency Preparedness Council, which brings public safety leaders together with locally elected officials to share information on preparedness and align response priorities. At the responder level, the region is served by multiple cross-jurisdictional work groups that represent the region's law enforcement, fire, public health, transportation, sheltering, information technology, and other emergency response disciplines. These groups meet regularly to identify the region's preparedness needs, implement projects or initiatives to fill those gaps, report progress to the Senior Policy Group and Chief Administrative Officers, and participate in training and preparedness exercises.

The value of meeting regularly with peers and colleagues to share information on emergency response preparedness and capabilities cannot be overstated. The inclusive planning structure that we have in the NCR means that our public safety leaders know each other by name, are comfortable working together, and know how to contact each other. When an emergency is pending or is in progress, we are able share and obtain situational awareness, make informed decisions to secure their jurisdictions, execute mutual aid agreements, and perform other critical tasks.

As emergency managers, situational awareness is among our most important responsibilities. In a large geographic area that spans multiple jurisdictions such as the NCR, knowing what is happening, where it is happening, and what is coming next can be especially challenging. Thanks to strategic investments of homeland security grant funds, the region's response agencies are able to access and share real-time emergency response information. In Maryland and in the NCR, we rely on an internet-based, emergency management system to share information and updates on real-time emergency response activities with our local, regional, and federal response partners. We monitor the region's roadway conditions using the Regional Integrated Transportation Information System. Our public health responders use a bio-surveillance tool called ESSENCE to detect the presence of biological agents or other infectious public health threats. And every jurisdiction in the NCR has systems in place to push emergency information to the public through text alerts, social media, and traditional public communication means.

NCR jurisdictions also recognize the importance of preparedness training and exercises to ensure first responders and executive leaders are ready to respond when disasters occur. Last year the Maryland Emergency Management Agency helped lead a series of workshops throughout the NCR to identify the specific emergency response training and preparedness needs of the region's first responders, including fire and emergency medical services, law enforcement, public health, emergency managers, mass care, and many other disciplines. The resulting Training and Exercise Plan will serve as a roadmap for the NCR to accomplish its training and exercise goals for the next two years, help responders develop specialized skills, and bring them in contact with partners in neighboring jurisdictions or other response disciplines.

Maryland also aggressively pursues emergency response training and exercises for all of its first responders. As in the NCR, Maryland Emergency Management leads annual workshops in Maryland's other regions to identify the training and exercise needs that help local first responders address local hazards and risks. We conduct similar workshops for state response agencies and holds quarterly Cabinet-level tabletop exercises for the State's executive leadership. After each real-world emergency or large exercise, we conduct an After Action Review to identify corrective actions and develop an implementation plan to ensure response plans and emergency Standard Operating Procedures reflect these valuable lessons-learned.

Most Urban Areas face similar challenges in sharing information and coordinating emergency response across multiple jurisdictions with separate police, fire, and emergency medical services. In the NCR, these challenges are magnified by the high number of state and local response agencies, multiple sets of response plans, policies, and statutes that serve individual jurisdictions, and the presence of more than 200 federal agencies and hundreds of thousands of federal employees who live and work in the region. The traffic congestion that affected the region on January 26, 2011 – after federal agencies released workers during a snow and ice weather event – demonstrates the importance of coordinating emergency response plans among federal and state agencies and local emergency response agencies, consulting with local partners on response decisions, and sharing real-time information.

Establishing close working relationships between jurisdictions and response agencies before a disaster occurs and conducting regular preparedness training and exercises are the best defense against the forces and habits that often lead cities and states to respond to emergencies and make decisions in silos and without coordination. By regularly meeting to discuss regional goals and evaluate response capabilities, responders and executive decision-makers in NCR jurisdictions are able to identify gaps in response plans or problems ahead of time and implement corrective actions. During emergencies we know the specific individuals in neighboring jurisdictions who are able to provide information, mutual aid, or other resources.

Active engagement with federal agencies is critical to the region's ability to effectively respond to emergency incidents in the NCR. As with all states, Maryland works with FEMA's regional administrative office on issuing presidential emergency declarations prior to pending emergencies, deploying federal resources to affected areas, and gathering damage assessment data for public and individual assistance funds. Outside of emergency events, FEMA's administrative regional office provides technical assistance and guidance on managing homeland security and preparedness grant programs and on complying with FEMA requirements. We participate in FEMA-sponsored regional emergency response planning initiatives and training exercises with our state partners to identify shared planning goals, exchange information on changes and updates to statewide response plans, and sharpen our emergency response skills.

FEMA's Office of the National Capital Region Coordinator (ONCRC), on the other hand, performs a unique policy and preparedness-oriented role. This office was created to help coordinate emergency response plans developed by federal agencies with local jurisdictions in the NCR. It serves as a single federal point-of-contact for the NCR's local emergency managers to help them coordinate response plans with the federal agencies that operate in their jurisdictions and convene planning meetings and initiatives between federal agencies and local jurisdictions.

For more than 10 years, ONCRC has provided a key capacity to state and local partners in the NCR. Although it does not make homeland security spending decisions, ONCRC formally participates in the NCR's Senior Policy Group as well as many of the regional response working groups and provides these groups with the federal perspective on setting homeland security goals for the region and a federal perspective on the emergency planning conducted in the region.

As home to the Nation's Capitol and many of the federal assets that are critical to maintaining continuity of government, the NCR should continue to have access to FEMA resources that are dedicated to meeting the region's preparedness needs. Although I am pleased that ONCRC will continue to have a presence in the region, I believe that ONCRC would be better able to serve the NCR's jurisdictions by being able to report to and draw resources from the highest levels within FEMA Headquarters.

It is not difficult to imagine the attacks on this year's Boston Marathon happening at FedEx Field in Prince George's County, a Presidential Inauguration, or any one of the many other public events that draw thousands of participants to the National Mall each year. Despite the severity of injuries inflicted on hundreds of Boston Marathon runners, family members, and friends, the fact that the bombings resulted in just three fatalities speaks to the high level of preparedness that Boston's first responders, executive leaders, and residents have developed.

The tools and capabilities that Boston deployed in response to the bombings on April 15, 2013 – interoperable voice radio systems, specialized bomb and CBRNE detection equipment, communication and information-sharing platforms, and constructive working relationships between public safety and public officials – are similar to the response capabilities that the NCR has invested its resources and efforts in building for the past decade. Although we can never predict with complete certainty how emergency events will unfold, the NCR is well positioned for responding effectively to terrorist attacks.

Going forward, our job as a region will be to maintain these capabilities while we receive decreasing support from homeland security grant programs. My colleagues in the Senior Policy Group and the region's Chief Administrative Officers understand that relying on federal funds to

maintain our response capabilities is not a sustainable, long-term solution. Each year, as we evaluate the effectiveness of our homeland security investments, we look for ways to maintain the specialized equipment, tools, personnel and other capabilities with local and state resources. While these efforts are on-going, there is no doubt that as a region we continue to rely on federal support to help us maintain our preparedness for the next disaster.

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, thank you for allowing me to testify today.