

Written Testimony of

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Disaster Recovery and Intergovernmental Affairs

Regarding

National Capitol Region Emergency Preparedness

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Chairman Akaka, Chairman Pryor, Ranking Member Johnson, Ranking Member Paul and distinguished members of the Subcommittees, on behalf of Governor McDonnell and the Commonwealth of Virginia, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Virginia shares an outstanding relationship with our partner jurisdictions at the local, state and federal level in the National Capitol Region (NCR). I would like to recognize our outstanding public servants, the area's first responders who are among the finest in the nation. They responded in an exemplary manner on 9/11/2001 when Arlington Virginia was directly attacked by terrorists at the Pentagon, and they continue to respond to every emergency event this region presents. We could not be prouder of them.

Virginia is home to nearly 48% of the NCR's citizens according to the 2010 census. Our NCR localities have a Manager form of government as opposed to an elected executive. These Managers or appointed Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs) are vested with the authorities necessary to manage the operations of their respective jurisdictions. Our emergency professionals follow the National Response Framework, National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the Incident Command System (ICS) when managing emergency events. With the exception of Arlington County, highways as well as primary and secondary roads in Virginia's portion of the NCR are managed by the state through the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT).

Virginia works with our NCR partners to accomplish strategic planning and training. By statute I serve as the Governor's representative on the NCR Senior Policy Group (SPG) along with the Homeland Security Advisors and heads of emergency management for Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia as well as the Director of the Office of National Capitol Region Coordination. We meet regularly and work closely with the Chief Administrative

Officer's through CAO Homeland Security Executive Committee (CAO HSEC) where we jointly oversee the evaluation of regional goals and priorities, and determine regional Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) project funding to ensure projects are in line with the NCR strategic plan. Members of both these organizations participate in the NCR Emergency Preparedness Council (EPC). Other NCR coordinating groups include the NCR Regional Emergency Support Function (RESF) committees and the Regional Programmatic Working Groups (RPWGs) all of which collaborate to assist the NCR leadership with defining, planning and implementing strategic initiatives and with the evaluation and updating of the NCR Strategic Plan. Virginia considers the NCR Strategic Plan in making investment and strategic decisions within or which affect Virginia NCR localities. In addition, Virginia works to incorporate input from NCR partners in the Commonwealth of Virginia Emergency Operations Plan (COVEOP) and the Virginia Strategic Plan.

Virginia has recently completed an updated evacuation plan for Northern Virginia which assumes a "no notice" event. Participants in this planning included local, federal and District partners. Considerable planning has been done to prepare for another attack on the Pentagon to include annual exercises with participants from across the region. NCR health partners have collaborated on response plans for biological, radiologic and chemical events.

Virginia, Maryland, the District and federal government decision makers all coordinate in advance of, and during emergency events through numerous information sharing and mutual aide tools. Situational awareness information is pushed out daily to NCR participants through e-mail and text alerts covering weather events, traffic incidents, police activities and planned events.

When an emergency is pending or has occurred information is shared and coordination facilitated through e-mails, text messages and conference calls all facilitated via the Regional

Incident Communication and Coordination System (RICCS). Information sharing tools such as the internet based Emergency Operation Center (WEBEOC), the Virginia Interoperability Picture for Emergency Response (VIPER) and the Regional Integrated Transportation Information System (RITIS) provide common operating picture situational awareness. The Washington Area Warning and Alert System (WAWAS), provides a “when all else fails” means for communications to over 200 facilities.

Virginia has co-located our regional decision makers for the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM), and Virginia State Police (VSP) at a 24/7 Operations Center located at the Fairfax Public Safety Tactical Operation Center (PSTOC) to facilitate face to face decision making. Additional transportation coordination is provided through Metropolitan Area Transportation Operations Coordination (MATOC) which is a joint program of the NCR DOTs and Metro.

NCR coordination is further facilitated through the UASI supported National Capital Region Network (NCR Net), a secure terrestrial data pathway between public safety entities and emergency operations centers. NCR Net hosts a Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) CAD to CAD system allowing participants to share information and resources.

In addition to daily use radios two strategic radio caches are located in the NCR. Each cache contains approximately 500 portable radios, satellite communications capabilities, and interoperability devices that can serve as a “bridge” between the organic communications systems of NCR jurisdictions as well as federal entities.

A challenge in a “no notice” event is not having had an opportunity to communicate advance preparedness messages to the public. General preparedness messaging is ongoing. When each weather season begins, specific preparedness messages are crafted and pushed out.

Virginia is currently engaged in our Winter Preparedness Campaign. Citizens can learn how to prepare for the season by accessing www.readyvirginia.gov where they will find information on preparing a winter kit, making a family emergency plan and other best practices. This information is available to all NCR residents.

For commuters this is the time to prepare their vehicles by checking tires, washer fluids, snow chains and outfitting their vehicle with a winter preparedness kit containing warm clothing, water, and rations. During winter no commuter should leave home without wearing appropriate footwear and protective clothing. Most importantly commuters should be prepared to stay in place when road conditions are projected to be unsafe.

Transportation capacity is a primary issue during any event in the NCR. On a normal day when the workforce has a staggered commute traffic is heavily congested. The tendency during an emergency is to leave the workplace all at once creating gridlock. Staying in place is a critical component of preventing subsequent emergencies such as vehicle wrecks, hazardous material contamination, and compounded traffic delays due to abandoned or disabled vehicles. But staying in place means citizens need to plan in advance for the care of loved ones in the event they cannot get home at their regular time. Knowing the emergency plans for their children's schools and day care centers, sharing their own emergency plan with their care providers and loved ones, and using text messaging as opposed to mobile phones are all beneficial in getting through emergency. Citizens need to take personal responsibility for checking the weather conditions before they begin their commute. If unsafe conditions are forecast they should alter their commuting plans.

The NCR Public Information Officer committee has recently established the NCR Virtual Joint Information Center (VJIC) at www.capitalregionupdates.gov. This site provides a single

web stop for the public to access all current NCR event information and messaging and to sign up for subscriber based text and e-mail alerts. Additionally PIOs push information to local radio, television, print, and online media during an event. These messages are coordinated and unified while allowing flexibility for varying conditions within different jurisdictions of the NCR.

Emergencies are localized events. Because of the vast geographic area of the NCR it may be sunny and cold in one part of the NCR yet snowing heavily in another. The responders and emergency officials on the ground are empowered with delegated authorities from their Principals through emergency operations plans, executive orders, state statute and local code to make the decisions that are necessary for the safety of our citizens. This bottom up framework is essential in emergency management.

Every incident provides the opportunity for lessons learned and to inform an evolving preparedness strategy. The events of January 26, as well as the earthquake have become catalysts for change. The federal Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has committed publically to making decisions earlier and not bringing the work force in when dangerous weather conditions are forecast. They have also stated they will embrace a “Stay in Place” strategy.

The strength of the Commonwealth and the NCR lies in our close working relationships and the combined expertise of our individual emergency responders and emergency officials. Abiding by the National Response Framework and employing the National Incident Management System through the Incident Command System is essential to successful emergency event management. Understanding these systems and avoiding policy decisions that will confuse, or conflict with this doctrine is critical to the NCRs ability to respond to future emergencies.

Mr. Chairman, Members, thank you for allowing me to testify today.