



Testimony of  
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before the  
Briefing and Roundtable Discussion on  
Preparedness, Response, and Recovery for Children  
at the invitation of Congresswoman Corrine Brown  
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### **Incorporating Children in Community Disaster Plans**

Congresswoman Brown, distinguished Members of Congress, and fellow members of the Roundtable, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to present information on the subject of incorporating children in community disaster plans and overall on the subject of emergency preparedness as it impacts children.

My name is Kathleen Henning and I am President of Region 3 of the International Association of Emergency Managers, an organization representing over 3000 local emergency managers from across the United States and over 800 emergency managers in other countries. My region includes Maryland, Virginia, Delaware, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Washington DC. I am also on the IAEM Government Affairs Committee and liaison to the National Citizen Corps Council representing emergency managers. I have frequently been asked to participate in workgroups and stakeholder meetings at the national level. But my roots come from the local community. In 2004 I retired from County government after 29 ½ years as the Emergency Coordinator for Montgomery County, Maryland. For those of you who may not be as

familiar with the role of an Emergency Manager, it was my task to work with various organizations to form partnerships and work collaboratively with both public and private organizations, with first responders, with governmental agencies and voluntary organizations at every jurisdictional level. During my almost 30 years as an Emergency Manager and my 27 years as a volunteer firefighter, I responded to all types of emergencies and disasters including hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, ice storms, power outages, fires, chemical spills, and explosions as well as acts of terrorism including the anthrax letters, the Pentagon on September 11<sup>th</sup> and the DC Sniper Shooting. In 2005 I responded to New Orleans following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita to work in the morgue as part of a DMORT (Disaster Mortuary) team. The wide variety of events has taught me the importance of a strong emergency management system flexible and capable of responding to all types of hazards and including all parts of the community under an integrated response system.

### **DC Sniper Event**

The tragedy of the DC Sniper Shooting pointed out the vulnerability of a community's children to the rampage of a madman, while standing in front of the very school where they should have felt safe and protected. But the coordinated response of the school board with Emergency Management and law enforcement also pointed out the benefits of an integrated plan for managing the crisis and securing children within their school buildings. We worked well together because we had planned and worked together on projects before the crisis.

### **Collaborations**

Because it is critically important that responders not be meeting each other for the first time in times of disaster, it was my responsibility as an Emergency Manager to draw together key resources and engage them during the entire cycle of disaster preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery. During my years with Montgomery County, I worked with school administrators, social workers, public health professionals, voluntary organizations, and academics.

Together, we addressed the issues of vulnerable populations in our community as part of our planning process, recognizing that the most vulnerable populations were our elderly, our disabled, and our children.

### **Shelter Task Force- EOC**

When we would activate our Emergency Operations Center, we had a designated Shelter Task Force that included representatives from the schools, the Division of Aging and Disabilities, the Volunteer Center, the 24 hour Crisis Center, Community Use of Schools, and the American Red Cross to address the needs of special populations during evacuations and shelter operations. They were part of the overall Emergency Management system and worked in conjunction with the public safety agencies as part of our unified and integrated approach to emergencies. I appreciate the opportunity to share some of the experiences and best practices of Emergency Managers as you review the issues of how to best incorporate issues surrounding children in community emergency response plans.

### **Fire Department**

I would add that as a volunteer I also work with teenagers. As the Junior Fire Brigade Coordinator I help train and mentor up to 15 teenagers at any one time. Our program is designed for young people ages 14-17, providing training in first aid, search and rescue, injury prevention, disaster response and disaster preparedness. Twenty years ago when we first started the program, the junior members were all Caucasian and primarily male students. Today the JFB make-up reflects the changes in our community—there are equal numbers of girls and boys, there are 4 Asians, 2 African-Americans, and several of the young people are bilingual with English as their second language. Times have changed, and the fire service is adapting to the changes of the community.

I appreciate the opportunity to share with you how emergency managers are currently working on issues related to children in disasters, and how the

Congress can help with federal funding to improve state and local planning efforts.

### **Are We Better Prepared?**

While much of the federal funding over the past several years has focused on the threat of terrorism, emergency managers at the state and local level have had to find ways to stretch these dollars so that they benefitted an all hazards approach to planning, training, and exercising. Local planning dollars are especially limited and must be used to provide an integrated approach to planning for all parts of a local community. Our Chairman of the IAEM Governmental Affairs Committee Bob Bohlmann from Maine has said, "We are better equipped than we have been in the past, but we may not be better prepared." Ellis Stanley of Los Angeles, when he testified before the Senate Subcommittee on Homeland Security Committee on Appropriations, noted that it is time to turn our attention to the "equally important task of re-establishing a effective emergency management system which links federal, state, and local partners in an integrated emergency management process- consisting of mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery." Let me address the issue of integrated planning for local communities, and how we may better be able to serve the needs of children in disasters by strengthening our emergency management resources.

### **Montgomery County,MD**

M-NCPP estimates that Montgomery County has a population of over 970,000, the state's most populous jurisdiction. Two trends attribute to this ongoing growth: record high levels of births and strong immigration from other countries to the County. As an Emergency Manager the effectiveness of my planning and preparedness efforts were affected by the problems of literacy, English as a second language, inadequate daycare resources, inadequate housing, overcrowding in schools, and public health concerns. These were not issues that arose only after emergencies occurred in the community. But they were issues that affected the ability of our most vulnerable populations to rebound back.

Montgomery County's elected leadership supported a strong Emergency Management program that relied on collaboration and partnerships with the Board of Education, other governmental agencies, with private sector resources, and volunteers as part of our overall disaster preparedness system. Similar to other Emergency Managers across the country, these partnerships and collaborations were especially important in meeting the needs of children within our community.

### **Lessons learned from Katrina**

Others have noted the problems uncovered by the weaknesses and failures of the local, regional and federal response to New Orleans during Katrina. Prior to the hurricanes of 2005 there had been some hurricane planning and exercising but the lessons learned were not integrated into a comprehensive catastrophic plan that promoted community-wide disaster resilience. The disastrous outcome highlighted the need for better family emergency plans, plans for repatriation of families, better delivery systems for emergency care during the event and public health services afterwards, and the breakdown of coordination with schools for the immediate and long-term issues for relocated students and schools, including mental health concerns.

Instead of focusing only on the problems, I would like to highlight several best practices from around the country that address the issue of integrating children into community planning for emergencies.

### **Existing partnerships with Schools**

One of the strongest and most important partnerships that are fostered and nurtured in the best prepared communities are those that involve Emergency Management and schools. Montgomery County Maryland worked with the schools to provide training for Emergency Response Teams within the schools with immediate response capability. Officials worked with parents and community organizations in providing outreach on plans for evacuation versus

shelter-in-place known as the Code Red/Code Blue system. Following the DC Sniper Shooting, they worked with mental health providers for the schools. Afterwards, they helped coordinate child safety drills and exercises including a multi-agency response to a shooter inside one of the area high schools. Funding through the Department of Education and FEMA Emergency Management Performance Grants were used by Emergency Managers to provide this type of training and exercise for schools as part of the overall testing exercising of the Emergency Operations Plan.

### **Existing partnerships with Citizen Corps Councils**

Partnerships with public schools across the country were formed in 2004-2005 when federal funding was used to distribute all weather radios to public schools. Citizen Corps Councils offered the services of its affiliate ham radio and CERT volunteers to help program the radios. These radios can now be used to provide all hazards alerts such as tornado warnings or evacuation notices from elected officials. The radios provide a higher level of safety for children while in school. But the program has not provided universal coverage and there are still areas around the country without this protection. A legislative initiative that we would recommend would be to have NOAA provide additional funding to expand the coverage of the all weather/all hazard radios. We would similarly recommend that daycare facilities be encouraged to have these inexpensive radios as part of their disaster kits.

### **Existing partnerships with Home Safety Council**

In 2004 the Home Safety Council issued the results of a national survey that noted that children and older adults are the two most vulnerable groups for most types of unintentional home injuries. The report recommended that multiple organizations commit to a collaborative national effort to address the home safety problem. The Home Safety Council collaborated with CDC, IAEM, National Safety Council, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and other organizations on the HSC Expert Network to develop community outreach educational programs

designed to reach children. The Home Safety Council partnered with the National Fire Protection Association for its *Risk Watch* program aimed at school age kids (K-8). Another project that collaborated to bring disaster preparedness and safety messages to over one million children was the Weekly Reader Project. Of particular interest to me was the Great Safety Adventure since I worked with others in developing the safety messages. Through grants from the Home Safety Council with funding from Lowes and its vendor partners, the Great Safety Adventure took two large interactive trailers to communities, especially in the inner cities and in small isolated communities. Often the selection of school districts and schools would be coordinated with the Board of Education and Emergency Managers. This project reached over 4 million children with its safety messages through an interactive experience in which children actually practiced evacuation from a simulated smoke filled room. Information was shared with parents in materials shared in the classroom with teachers.

### **Existing partnerships with Public Health**

In the National Capital Region of Washington, all the jurisdictions have collaborated on the NCR Cities Readiness Initiative. Multi-jurisdictional pandemic planning has been done utilizing the schools as community centers for the mass distribution of vaccinations and public health information. CDC funding helped partially fund exercises and production of public health brochures and development of websites. In Frederick County Maryland Emergency Management coordinated with Public Health to combine their flu vaccination clinics with a test of their CRI capabilities. Children received free flu mist or shots as appropriate, parents were educated on the community system for distribution of medications, and staff and volunteers were trained on the Incident Management System to better manage multiple clinics through a Public Health Command and Control Center.

## **Connecticut Legislative Response**

In an effort to provide the best possible emergency management protections for the children of the State of Connecticut, the legislature in 2002 passed the Special Act 02-08 to address the needs of children. But it soon became apparent to them that an act which dealt solely with the needs of children only further isolated them by encouraging stovepipe planning and efforts.

In 2005 the Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security revived its Child Safety and Crisis Response Committee which emphasized collaborations and an integrated approach to the problems of children. The Committee is made up of representatives from state, regional and local emergency management agencies and associations, the Departments of Education, Social Services, Public Health, Children and Families, the Commission on Children, School Superintendents, the Governor's Prevention Partnership; the state Office of Policy and Management; and the American Red Cross. The Committee provides training of school resources on a local and regional basis using a US Department of Education Grant to bring together the first responder community and schools. In coordination with the Commission on Children, DEMHS now reaches out to preschool, after school and day care providers throughout the state. DEMHS is also leading an initiative to provide Homeland Security Information Network portal access to local school administrators on timely child safety information. The goal of the committee is to increase the availability and scope of training and to develop a robust program of child safety drills and exercises. This was coordinated through Emergency Management and Homeland Security because Emergency Managers are trained and experienced in the administration of grants.

## **Importance of EMPG Grants**

The Emergency Management Performance Grants (EMPG) are the single most effective use of federal funds in providing emergency management capacity to state and local governments. But as the National Emergency Management

Association (NEMA) noted in its national survey taken in 2006, these grants have been consistently underfunded. Why is this important to improving planning in communities, and especially planning for the needs of children and other vulnerable populations? Because EMPG funds directly provide for state and local capabilities to do the necessary planning, build systems and relationships with key resources, support coordination and collaborations among a broad base of responders, and ensuring that the systems work together by providing training and exercises for all the necessary partners.

### **NEMA Survey on EMPG Underfunding**

The survey noted that EMPG funding ranged from a state low of \$350,000 to a high of \$14 million, with the states receiving an average of approximately \$3.1 million, keeping approximately 53% at the state level, and sharing 46% with local jurisdictions and 1% with other state agencies and organizations. These funds are used specifically for personnel that update plans, such as evacuation, sheltering, and catastrophic disasters. EMPG funds provide for the people who write the plans, conduct the training, exercises and corrective actions, educate the public on disaster readiness and maintain the nation's emergency response system. Despite this personnel support, EMPG funding remains inadequate. Many local jurisdictions have only part-time emergency managers due to budgetary constraints, and Emergency Management, particularly at the local level, still relies heavily on volunteers.

### **Summary**

The most important and critical component for strengthening our national preparedness and response to disasters is to build up and maintain a state and local capability to prepare for and respond to emergencies by ensuring that funding is available. These dollars can best be leveraged by adequately funding planning and prevention activities at the community level. All disasters start and end at the local level. As the tragedies of 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina well illustrated, weaknesses in preparedness can undermine the responses to

disaster of even our best resourced communities. Many of the problems that face children in disasters are tied to the problems of families in poverty – they lack the resources to sustain their families on a day to day basis. Facing day to day crises without access to adequate jobs, transportation, day care, schools, and health care, families in poverty are more vulnerable during times of crisis. While Emergency Managers cannot address the problems of poverty, they can work with the families that are impacted to better prepare them for emergencies and disasters through an integrated approach to community planning. Emergency Managers are uniquely qualified to bring the necessary partners to the table to provide the services and preparedness efforts needed to reach all of our vulnerable populations, including our children.

As Emergency Managers we stand ready to work with organizations within our communities to improve the planning for special populations and ensure the needs of children are met as part of that planning process. As Emergency Managers we offer our services to your Committee to better understand the issues affecting children and are ready to discuss ways in which the planning and funding processes can be improved. Thank you for the opportunity to join with you today in this effort.