



National Commission on Children and Disasters



www.childrenanddisasters.acf.hhs.gov

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Milestone Federal Report Cites Persistent Gaps in Disaster Preparedness as Fifth Anniversary of Hurricane Katrina Approaches *National Commission Calls for Protections for Children in Disasters*

WASHINGTON, August 23, 2010 -- The National Commission on Children and Disasters today approved a report to the President and Congress that cites persistent gaps in disaster preparedness for children since Hurricane Katrina five years ago. The report calls for the development of a national strategy for children in disasters to ensure children are protected before, during and after an emergency.

"Children are 25 percent of our nation's population but they are neglected when it comes to disaster management," said Mark Shriver, chairperson of the Commission. "If we're not prepared to protect children during disasters, then we're simply not prepared for disasters as a nation." We need a cohesive national strategy that addresses the unique needs of children and incorporates them into disaster plans."

Among the findings of the report are seriously underfunded federal programs for school disaster preparedness, insufficient coordination among federal, state and local agencies responsible for children and lack of preparedness in the private health care system, including a finding that only six percent of hospital emergency rooms carry essential pediatric equipment.

The Commission makes over 100 recommended actions to federal, state and local governments and non-governmental organizations to improve protections for children. Among these actions are:

- Calling on the President to develop a National Strategy on Children and Disasters
- Establishing permanent focal points of coordination for children and disasters, including FEMA Regional Offices;
- Providing funds to improve disaster planning for schools, child care, juvenile justice and child welfare systems;
- Purchasing child-appropriate supplies for shelters, ambulances and hospitals;

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- Creating a national evacuee tracking system to reunite children with families as quickly as possible.

The Commission was established by Congress and the President in 2007 as an independent, bipartisan body to identify gaps in disaster preparedness, response and recovery for children, and make recommendations to close the gaps. The 10 members of the Commission have diverse backgrounds in pediatric medicine, mental health, children's advocacy, emergency management and state elected office. The Commission issued an Interim report in October 2009 and a Progress Report in March 2010.

For the executive summary of the report, go to www.childrenanddisasters.acf.hhs.gov. The final version of the report will be available in early October.