

Ms. Sima Merick

**President, National Emergency Management Association
Executive Director, Ohio Emergency Management Agency**

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

**On behalf of the
National Emergency Management Association**

Submitted to the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee

Addressing the Threats of Worsening Natural Disasters

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National Emergency Management Association
444 N. Capitol Street, NW Suite 401
Washington, DC 20001
202-624-5459

Thank you, Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Portman, and distinguished members of the Committee for allowing me to testify today.

I am proud to testify today on behalf of the National Emergency Management Association (NEMA). NEMA represents the state emergency management directors of all 50 states, territories, and the District of Columbia. As Executive Director of the Ohio Emergency Management Agency and on behalf of my colleagues in state emergency management, we thank you for holding this discussion on the current state of preparedness for natural disasters and how we are handling the increasing number of events.

BUILDING CAPACITY

To have successes in preparedness, states must work hard to ensure their capacity to effectively respond and recover. Three fundamental pieces stand-out when looking at state capacity – How States Help Themselves; How States Help One Another; and The State-Federal Partnership.

How States Help Themselves. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is not a first responder. According to a report produced by the National Emergency Management Association (NEMA) and International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM), in FY20, state and local emergency management organizations managed 19,752 events without federal assistance. Furthermore, we must set expectations in what federal programs can, cannot, should, and should not be able to accomplish.

According to NEMA's 2020 Biennial Report, 27 states maintain their own state-funded assistance program to help citizens and businesses when a disaster or emergency does not meet the criteria for a federal declaration. Of those, 21 have public assistance programs; ten have individual assistance programs; six offer unmet needs programs; and nine have other assistance programs. Other assistance programs also exist to meet shortfalls such as short-term housing assistance, hazard mitigation programs, housing and personal property losses, and shortfalls in local budgets due to damage incurred by a disaster.

How States Help One Another. For the past 25 years, states have utilized the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) to fill resource shortfalls during times of emergency or disaster. I utilized EMAC in Ohio during the 2016 Republican National Convention with great success. Without the trained, experienced, and equipped officers from other states, the City of Cleveland would not have been able to fully implement their security plan. This is the value of the EMAC, an all-hazards, all-disciplines system that can tap into any resource or service a state may need and leverage that experience for national response. We have seen examples of similar successes across the country:

- One week into Hurricane Ida's response over 4,000 personnel were deployed with another 1,000 personnel to follow in the weeks to come. To date, 24 EMAC member states, including Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, Oklahoma, Wisconsin, and others have sent resources to Louisiana in response to Hurricane Ida.
- With states stretched to their limit during the COVID-19 response, limited public health, medical, and EMS resources were shared through mutual aid. States like Delaware and others requested and received a loan of ventilators from California, and other states were able to share N-95

masks, gloves, gowns, and other commodities through EMAC.

- When the U.S. Forest Service saw a shortage of wildland fire fighters, California requested and received fire fighters and National Guard resources from Arizona, Oklahoma, Utah, Wisconsin, and other states. Nevada has also been supporting a shelter operation through EMAC for displaced citizens fleeing from California wildfires.
- Oklahoma served as a virtual liaison to the FEMA Region VI Regional Response Coordination Center, saving both time and money to coordinate the state EMAC response with FEMA and the Emergency Support Functions.
- Montana, the District of Columbia, and NEMA provided virtual liaison support to the FEMA National Response Coordination Center, the National Guard Bureau, and U.S. Northern Command.

Since March 2020, nearly 10,000 personnel have been deployed through EMAC, leveraging the nation's best response and recovery personnel to help one another. No other mutual aid system in the nation has the efficiency, flexibility, and scalability of EMAC which has deployed nearly 40,000 personnel since 2016.

EMAC gives states the opportunity to leverage federal grant dollars invested in building capabilities and provides experiences that can be taken back home to improve plans and procedures. This culture of preparedness is the core of the nation's emergency management capabilities, deploying National Guard as well as equipment and personnel from all response and recovery disciplines in response to any range of hazards is simply unparalleled.

Implemented by the state emergency management agencies for a coordinated response, EMAC has grown to include all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands since being ratified by Congress as Public Law 104—321 in 1996.

As EMAC celebrates 25 years, states continue finding innovative ways to utilize the Compact and to continually improve implementation starting with pre-scripting resource requests and developing Mission Ready Packages for rapid response. Over the coming years, states will be working with FEMA to identify areas where the reimbursement and documentation requirements of mutual aid can be simplified under the Public Assistance program to reduce complexity in direct support of FEMA's strategic goal.

The State-Federal Partnership. One of the ways in which emergency managers build capacity is through programs such as the Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG). With a one-to-one matching requirement at the local and state levels, this program represents one of the best values in federal investment. EMPG continues as a critical driver of progress and success made across the country in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from all hazards. The program's success is shared by all levels of government and relies heavily on the continued, and decades-long, commitment of Congress.

In 2020, the federal investment in EMPG was \$355 million — a little more than \$1 per citizen — and with the match requirement and additional state and local investment, the return on investment exceeded \$700 million and was felt in communities from Maine to California. Every investment the federal government makes is matched dollar-for-dollar and, in most cases, states, localities, and tribes match even

more, illustrating that any cuts to EMPG funding will have far-reaching and long-term impacts on readiness.

For these reasons in FY22, NEMA joined with colleagues of IAEM, representing local emergency management, in requesting Congress codify one of the supplemental funding amounts of \$100 million to bring the annual total to \$455 million. Given the matching requirement of EMPG, many of which states and locals far exceed, this increase will have a combined impact totaling at least \$200 million nationwide. Few other federal programs can demonstrate that rate of return.

OHIO SPECIFICS

In recent years, Ohio boasts myriad preparedness activities underway to help build capacity, improve response capabilities, and expedite recovery efforts. The recent events we managed, in conjunction with the COVID-19 response, have tested our preparedness efforts. But due to the success of some ongoing programs, we continue to be successful.

Since the outbreak of COVID, Ohio's Emergency Operations Center remains active after nearly 500 consecutive days. In addition to the more than 3,000 missions in support of Ohio's residents, first responders, and health community for COVID, we continue administering Public Assistance for weather-related disaster from 2018 and 2019. Despite these ongoing events, our continued preparedness programs are stronger than ever.

The Ohio Safe Room Rebate Program provides a rebate for the purchase, construction, and installation of tornado safe rooms for homeowners selected for the program. This is particularly important as the entire State of Ohio is at risk of an EF5 tornado. Since 2011, the State of Ohio has been able to use Hazard Mitigation Assistance grant programs to fund over 465 safe rooms statewide. Montgomery County, which saw the brunt of the effects from the Memorial Day tornadoes in 2019, is currently the County with the most safe rooms in the State of Ohio.

In August 2019 the Ohio National Guard, in conjunction with the Ohio Emergency Management Agency, hosted the national level exercise Vigilant Guard 2019 (VG19). Co-sponsored by U.S. Army Northern Command and the National Guard Bureau, the scenario was based on a local, state, and federal response to a cyber-event that subsequently caused natural gas pipeline disruption and electrical blackouts impacting a large region. These major events triggered cascading challenges, including but not limited to, CBRNE, HAZMAT, civil disturbance, and mass casualty. The exercise worked to validate existing capabilities, levels of preparedness attained, and areas for increased preparation and response capability development. This effort paid dividends just months later when Ohio engaged in its largest-ever response operations related to COVID-19.

During this global pandemic, Ohio led the nation in best practices for virtual training. The Training and Exercise Section of my agenda hosted dozens of acclimation meetings with out-of-state, federal, and military partners from around the country to share our best practices of conducting virtual trainings. Most important was the focus on Incident Command Systems (ICS) trainings to ensure that the whole emergency response community understands ICS, national incident management systems, and unity of

effort required to work collaboratively during emergency response. Within the state, the Training and Exercise Section worked closely with the Cleveland Division of Police to support ICS training for their leadership staff in preparation for the 2021 National Football League Draft event, hosted in Cleveland in April 29 through May 1, 2021. In total, the Training and Exercise Section coordinated over 100 trainings and provided individual acclimation meetings for hundreds of students.

While the normal state disaster exercise schedule saw adjustment due to COVID-19 response, many exercises were still conducted to face the threats at-hand. These include hosting the Election Security Brief for the Ohio Mayor's Alliance, multiple COVID-19 response, and mass vaccination exercises, as well as releasing new K-12 Toolkits in coordination with Ohio Homeland Security. Ohio previously released multiple toolkits including [Mall Active Shooter](#), [Business Continuity: Disaster in the Workplace](#); [Higher Education Active Aggressor Tabletop Exercise Toolkit](#); [Houses of Worship: Targeted Disruption](#); and the [K-12 Severe Weather Table Top Exercise Toolkit](#); [K-12 School Hazmat Tabletop Exercise Toolkit](#); and [K-12 School Active Aggressor Tabletop Exercise Toolkit](#). These toolkits have been downloaded more than 3,700 times in nine countries and 46 states.

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

Earlier this year, NEMA released a set of policy recommendations to help modernize the profession and recognize the ever-changing face of disasters and disaster survivors. In addition to building state capacity, these recommendations focused on clarifying the role of emergency management in the age of COVID, building equity, and simplifying existing programs.

Clarify the Role of Emergency Management. The response to COVID-19 highlighted many successes but also weaknesses at all levels of emergency management. At the federal level, FEMA was not properly utilized until well into the event. The role of emergency management in all-hazards events, traditional and non-traditional, must be more clearly defined and formalized. Recommendations include:

- Define FEMA's role during incidents and disasters that require multiagency coordination. FEMA should be the lead coordinating agency for all multi-agency incidents across all phases of the incident, including recovery. This includes Stafford Act and non-Stafford Act events.
- Ensure FEMA's capacity to successfully achieve interagency coordination through adequate resourcing, staffing, and authorities.
- Maintain open lines of communication with elected leaders to ensure response plans are adequately understood, communicated, and rehearsed. Lessons learned from the COVID-19 response should be included to ensure adherence to plans during future events.

Ensure Diversity and Inclusion in Emergency Management. The role of disaster response and recovery requires sensitivity to the needs of all disaster survivors and equitable and fair distribution of federal assistance to all those affected. Recommendations include:

- Thoroughly review all current emergency management laws and policies through an equity lens, including identifying the intended and unintended effects of current policies on vulnerable individuals and at-risk communities. Special focus should be given to institutional inequities in hazard mitigation, individual assistance, and public assistance programs and include at-risk communities in areas susceptible to future effects of climate change.

- Integrate equity and cultural competence into current FEMA doctrine, training, and educational programs to influence sustainable changes throughout the Emergency Management Enterprise. Work with state and local officials to identify ways in which the Threat Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA) and State Preparedness Report can be utilized to ensure equity and deploy grant funds accordingly.
- Ensure the makeup of personnel within emergency management agencies look like the communities they serve. State and local emergency management must seek new ways to recruit and retain a diverse workforce.

Reduce the Complexity of the FEMA Public Assistance Program. Federal disaster recovery programs and processes are too complex, slow, bureaucratic, and in many cases can impede state and local governments' best efforts to improve outcomes for individuals and communities. Despite myriad attempts in recent years to streamline the Public Assistance Program, FEMA continues to struggle to achieve stated goals, incorporate the latest technology, and provide maximum flexibility to state and local officials. Recommendations include:

- Conduct a review of FEMA Headquarters versus FEMA Regional decision-making roles and authorities to aid in streamlining and fairness. While regions should have the flexibility in tailoring programs to the needs of individual states, all policy, guidance, and regulations should be applied fairly across the ten FEMA regions.
- Allow for grantees to utilize management costs allowance across all open disasters. As FEMA continues to evolve new management cost policies afforded through the Disaster Recovery Reform Act (DRRA), they should allow grantees to utilize management costs across all open disasters. This will help to enhance recovery and mitigation capacity, incentivize disaster close-out, and drive down the costs of disasters.
- Incorporate enhanced use of technology for Preliminary Damage Assessments (PDA). Integrate lessons learned from COVID-19 response to adopt operational remote PDAs as accepted practice.

CONCLUSION

On behalf of the state emergency managers, thank you again for holding this hearing and drawing attention to the needs of the emergency management community. Collectively, emergency management believes we must work together in building our respective capacities to respond, enhance equity in state and federal programs, and streamline FEMA programs to get assistance more quickly to the people who need it most. We can accomplish this by working together across all levels of government and ensuring the role of emergency management is clear regardless of the hazard. In doing all this, we look forward to continuing the strong relationship we have with this committee, and I welcome any questions you may have of me.