

TESTIMONY

of

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National President,

Grand Lodge, Fraternal Order of Police

on

**the Federal Emergency Management Agency's
Preparedness and Response to All Hazards**

**before the
Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings and
Emergency Management**

Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

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Good morning, Madam Chairman, Ranking Member Graves, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings and Emergency Management. My name is Chuck Canterbury, National President of the Fraternal Order of Police, the largest law enforcement labor organization in the United States. I am here this morning to represent the views of the more than 325,000 rank-and-file police officers with respect to the challenges faced by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and the entire public safety community in responding to all hazard critical incidents.

The FOP was initially very skeptical of charging FEMA with expanded authority over the law enforcement mission at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The FOP was concerned that a response-oriented organization like FEMA would be ill-suited to perform, oversee, and fund terrorism prevention activity. These concerns seemed wholly justified following the enactment of H.R. 5144 last year, which states that the “primary mission” of FEMA is:

...to reduce the loss of life and property and protect the Nation from all hazards, including natural disasters, acts of terrorism, and other man-made disasters, by leading and supporting the Nation in a risk-based, comprehensive emergency management system of preparedness, protection, response, recovery, and mitigation.

However, our fears have been allayed recently due to a number of reasons. Firstly, FEMA Administrator R. David Paulison has been in contact with our Executive Director, Jim Pasco, to discuss a number of issues related to FEMA’s mission and law enforcement’s role within it. Since that conversation, senior FEMA staff has been engaging in an ongoing dialogue with my staff and has listened to the concerns we have presented.

Secondly, Administrator Paulison has also created the position of a law enforcement advisor to the Administrator of FEMA and has asked the law enforcement community for our input in helping to develop the job description of this individual. Furthermore, he is including within his staff people from the law enforcement community who will bring the expertise and the know-how for FEMA. Administrator Paulison has also created the Office of National Security Coordination and is implementing the Integrated Public Alert Warning System (IPWAS), to provide communication to a larger number of citizens in a specific area. Previously, law enforcement did not have a considerable voice in the functioning of FEMA and that was a hindrance to the agency. That is beginning to change and these are all steps in the right direction.

We believe that Mr. Paulison is the right man for the job and will help to integrate law enforcement into the structure of FEMA more appropriately. He will have to be tenacious and will have to work hard to ensure that there is greater modicum of respect and understanding for the extremely important work that law enforcement does in the instance of a natural disaster or a man-made critical incident. However, we believe that the following statement made recently reflects such an understanding, and I quote:

We Are Not Alone. We Share Responsibility for Emergency Management with Our Partners in state and local government. We need to work better together when we're facing disasters. Katrina made it very clear that we need to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters as partners, standing side by side, so if there's a need in the system or a gap to fill, we fill it before there's a failure in the emergency management system. The traditional model of waiting for state and local capabilities to be overwhelmed before federal organizations try to come together to bring assistance to the scene of a disaster is no longer sufficient. Responding to all disasters, catastrophic or otherwise, must now be viewed from the perspective of "all for one" and "one for all." As an agency we are dedicated to being a partner with other Federal offices as well as state and local governments. Which is why the New FEMA will not go back to the old ways of doing things. We have learned and are evolving.

The FOP understands that FEMA is a culturally reactive agency. That has been made clear in FEMA's mission statement which ensures a system of preparedness, protection, response, and recovery. The FOP realizes this and understands that law enforcement cannot arrest a hurricane or pull over a tornado. The FOP also understands and is willing to accept that all disasters, natural or man-made, should be treated with an equal Federal response. What FEMA needs to understand and what we can do, however, is prevent a terrorist incident from occurring on our nation's soil by preventing threatening goods or people from entering this country. This is going to require a paradigmatic shift in the way FEMA works with law enforcement. It means that FEMA must work quickly and responsibly to fill the position of Assistant Administrator for Grants Management and Operations, which has yet to be done. Despite that, we are seeing the beginning of an evolution and we believe that Administrator Paulison understands the cultural shift that is requisite for this to happen.

We are ready to support Administrator Paulison in changing FEMA and creating a culture that is more feasible to law enforcement carrying out its mission. What the FOP also asks for is that the same respect and understanding be granted to law enforcement.

Last week I had the pleasure of testifying before this committee to discuss the recent proposal to eliminate the police officer position from the Federal Protective Service (FPS). The police officer position in that agency, which is a part of DHS, is being excised and the functions are being shifted to investigators and contract security guards. Let me repeat what I said before that committee: There is no substitute for highly trained and highly qualified law enforcement officers. These brave men and women provide the backbone for our homeland's security and it is necessary that they are respected in the manner by which they deserve. Any changes that are made to law enforcement that works against the skills and training of these officers increases the likelihood of another attack on American soil. This cannot continue.

There are no Cabinet officials utilizing contract security guards for their personal protective details, nor should there be. Members of Congress are protected by the brave men and women of the Capitol Police, and that is appropriate as well. Law enforcement officers need to understand what their mission is and should not be burdened with fears

that their job functions could be usurped by a less qualified contract security guard. How can we expect these men and women to carry out their jobs when the threat of a Reduction in Force (RIF) or transfer to another agency hangs over their head?

I believe that FEMA can work successfully with law enforcement to create a culture that not only helps recover from disasters, but also prevents them from occurring where possible. As I mentioned above, this is going to take a lot of hard work and it won't happen overnight. Working together, we can integrate these functions into FEMA and establish a more productive agency. It is necessary that law enforcement receives the respect and funding that it deserves, however. Shifting responsibilities and functions away from law enforcement can only serve to exacerbate the lack of a preventative culture in FEMA. Nevertheless, I believe things can change for the better and that a cultural shift will occur.

Thank you for letting me testify on this very important matter and I look forward to answering your questions.