

**Statement of
The Honorable Eleanor Holmes Norton
Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and
Emergency Management
Hearing On
“Saving Lives and Money Through The
Pre-disaster Mitigation Program”
April 30, 2008**

Welcome to all the witnesses with us this morning. Today's hearing will focus on the reauthorization of the Predisaster Mitigation program, authorized by section 203 of the Stafford Act (Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act), due to sunset on September 30th of this year. The Predisaster Mitigation program was first authorized by this Committee in the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000.

The title of today's hearing, "Saving Lives and Money through the Predisaster Mitigation Program," perfectly describes a program that saves far more than is invested. The Predisaster Mitigation program is a companion for the post-disaster hazard mitigation grant program, also authorized by this Committee, in section 404 of the Stafford Act.

The vast preponderance of disasters in the country are from natural hazards. Examples of mitigation for such disasters include elevating or buying out structures in a flood plain and strengthening buildings to better withstand earthquakes or hurricanes. This program provides cost-effective technical and financial assistance to state and local governments to reduce injuries, loss of life, and damage to property that might otherwise be caused by natural hazards. The Predisaster Mitigation program has been developed based on a successful pilot program, "Project Impact." One often cited example of the effectiveness of predisaster mitigation is from Washington State. Immediately after the Nisqually Earthquake struck Seattle on February 28, 2001, Seattle Mayor Paul Schell and other public officials cited predisaster mitigation grants that had fortified buildings as one of the primary reasons that lives and property were saved during the earthquake. Ironically, the Mayor's statements came on the same day that the Bush Administration claimed that the Project Impact predisaster mitigation pilot program should be defunded because it was not effective. However, Congress had already written this program into law based on compelling evidence that the Predisaster Mitigation program is an investment that has shown it works.

The evidence that had resulted in congressional action came from the successful pilot project, and has been substantiated by anecdotal evidence as provided by Seattle, and empirical evidence provided later by two congressionally mandated studies. In 2005, the Multihazards Mitigation Council, part of the National Institute of Building Sciences, chaired by one of our witnesses today, found "that a dollar spent on mitigation saves society an average of four dollars." The Congressional Budget Office issued a September 2007 report on the Predisaster Mitigation program, as required under the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000, which stated: "The best available information suggests that, on average future losses are reduced by about three dollars ...for each dollar spent on those projects, including both federal and

nonfederal spending.” Choose whatever study you prefer, but unavoidably, money for this program has consistently shown to provide an excellent return on investment.

Today’s hearing will focus on investments in mitigation measures which affect the safety of infrastructure. The full Transportation and Infrastructure Committee is planning a hearing on other investment opportunities which also will focus on our Nation’s infrastructure needs.