PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY

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Testimony

Of

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On behalf of
Prince George's County, Maryland

Before the Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management

Transportation and Infrastructure Committee

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I. INTRODUCTION

Good morning, Chairwoman Norton, Mr. Diaz-Balart, and Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Vernon Herron. I am the Deputy Chief Administrative Officer for Public Safety and Director of Homeland Security for Prince George's County, Maryland. I appear before you today on behalf of one of the largest Counties in the National Capitol Region. Currently, I also serve on the following committees, Statewide

Interoperability Executive for Maryland, Homeland Security for the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG), Interoperability Council for MWCOG, and the Governors Emergency Management Advisory Council (GEMAC).

Before I begin, I also want to take this time to thank Congresswoman Donna Edwards for her leadership in the critical issue of National Capitol Region public safety and for recommending that I appear before you today.

II. The realities facing the National Capitol Region

First, I want to take a moment to recall that Prince George's County has testified on this issue before. In July of 2006, Prince George's County Sheriff Michael Jackson testified before the House Energy & Commerce Committee on HR 5785, the *Warning, Alert, and Response Network Act*. In that testimony, Sheriff Jackson explained that warning the public of an impending disaster is a good first step, but not nearly enough to address the total reality of public safety in response to a large-scale disaster. We are pleased this hearing goes further than debating how we warn the public and discusses how we can lead and coordinate masses of people to safety.

Prince George's County, Maryland is located in the heart of the Baltimore/Washington corridor. The county borders Washington, DC and is just 37 miles south of the City of Baltimore. The County's population exceeds 820,000 with a daily work population of well over one million. Covering an area of close to 500 square miles, the County is home to many businesses, as well as state and federal agencies. Some of the Federal agencies include NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, Andrew's Air Force Base, several Smithsonian support centers, the Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Agriculture's Beltsville facility, a Federal Records Center, a large Internal Revenue Service office complex, and the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Center for Weather and Climate Prediction. Additionally, a large portion of the region's Metro system and Interstate 95 pass through Prince George's County.

Fortunately for most communities in America, the threat of terrorism remains just that; a threat. However, the United States has experienced several heinous acts of terrorism and wide-spread natural disasters which caused devastation and catastrophe. And 9/11 was an example of this devastation and catastrophe for New York, the National

Capitol Region and the entire United States. Therefore, Prince George's County is in a prime position to offer perspectives on how to address the need, impact, and practicality of orchestrating large-scale public safety response.

III. RESOURCES, OPERATIONS, COORDINATION AND FUNDING IN-PLACE TODAY

Coordinated planning across the National Capital Region (NCR) will greatly assist the utilization of limited resources available to support evacuation and sheltering of residents, citizens and visitors to the NCR. Actual emergencies are inherently unstable and consist of rapidly changing events whose outcome may be difficult, if not impossible to predict. Resource sharing will be necessary in order to ensure the region can efficiently manage a major evacuation or sheltering event.

Prince George's County works closely with MEMA and FEMA to ensure all resources needed are being utilized in the most efficient and effective manner. Locally, we have executed MOUs with the Board of Education to provide for emergency access and use of our 216 Public Schools located throughout the County. Although there is adequate number of public schools to shelter thousands of citizens, we do not have enough resources to open every school or multiple schools simultaneously, and handle our daily responsibilities.

The actual location and size of the shelter/school is determined by the number of people being displaced. Elementary and Middle schools are primarily used for small capacity and/or short term sheltering. High schools are used for long term and large capacity sheltering. For small events, the closest school outside the hot zone will be selected for sheltering. In the event that multiple shelters will be needed to house large number of citizens for an extended period, we have pre-selected two mega shelters, Ritchie Coliseum in the northern portion of the County and Show Place Arena in the southern portion both are capable of sheltering several hundred people.

The Ritchie Coliseum is located on both Metro rail and Metro Bus routes. Access to Showplace Arena will require bus transportation for residents without transportation. Both facilities provide for abundant parking allowing for residents to self evacuate if necessary.

Prince George's County also has pre-stocked mobile caches consisting of cots, blankets, pillows and personal hygiene kits ready for transport to any shelter location when needed. For larger shelter needs we have pre-positioned FEMA tractor trailers loaded with emergency shelter supplies ready to activate. Having immediate access to emergency supplies enables Prince George's County to mitigate, respond to, and recover from disastrous events. Disasters require coordination between our Public Safety departments, our Health and Human Services departments, as well as the other Emergency Support function (ESF) Agencies. Having these departments train and exercise together ensures that social service support and agency collaboration is available to assist during this trying time. The American Red Cross is also a major provider in assisting with all shelter operations, providing volunteers, and providing additional sheltering supplies.

In the event a full evacuation of the County is necessary, the County's transportation department has access to traffic cameras located at major traffic intersections. Using these cameras can alter the timing of traffic lights to reduce gridlock and facilitate smooth traffic flow. The experiences from past incidents reveal; vehicle evacuation requires a unified effort, and this will be required for the National Capital Region.

Regional Coordination is paramount to any effective response and recovery plan. To facilitate an effective recovery plan, the NCR has developed a regional video conferencing system. This video conference system uses its own data network lines which provide a direct link to every Emergency Operation Center (EOC) throughout the NCR. This direct link will work even when normal lines of communications have been rendered inoperable. We have determined that communication is the key to any successful recovery plan. The ability for senior officials from each jurisdiction to directly reach out and communicate with their neighbor in the NCR will not only enhance the recovery process but expedite the use of resource sharing and mutual aide. The need for video conferencing became evident during 911 when President Bush, while stationed on Airforce One was unable to video conference with his senior staff. The President was not able to address the public via the television. This flaw was one of the first concerns corrected in preparations for future events.

The MWCOG has played a major role in fostering regional communications. Through MWCOG, Senior Officials and Public Safety Chiefs and Directors of each ESF meet regularly to discuss issues and concerns that greatly impact jurisdictions ability to coordinate, communicate and collaborate during emergencies and disasters.

Prince George's County communicates directly with MEMA. During any major event, MEMA is advised of the event and placed on alert that mutual aid may be required, if the event becomes overwhelming. Routine updates are provided in WebEOC to allow MEMA as well as the entire NCR to monitor the event as it unfolds. Once again, regional information sharing and communication is paramount to a successful emergency mitigation.

Prince George's County depends on several Federal funding mechanisms to support the County's operations. Those mechanisms include: 1) The Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) grant; 2) COPS Law Enforcement Technology Program; 3) Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grants; 4) Byrne Discretionary Grants; 5) American Recovery Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds. These funding streams are critical to our continued ability to deliver public safety services and response capabilities. The FY2010 House Budget Resolution decreases the public safety function authority by $5 billion while increasing the outlay by only $1 billion. This discrepancy gives us pause as we are not able to provide as much public safety response to the NCR with cuts to important programs such as the ones I listed above.

IV. Recommendations

In examining the state-of-operations today, we would make the following recommendations:

- First and foremost, we must keep UASI whole and urge a FY2010 budget set not below $900 million ($837.5 million was the FY2009 enacted amount); Strive for greater coordination and communication between local governments and FEMA including the conducting of unified NCR drills and exercises;
- Establish clear and efficient reporting structures between local governments, FEMA, and the Executive Office of the President. In a disaster, authority and

authorizations need to move quickly thus requiring that FEMA have a direct line to the President and local governments have a direct line to top FEMA officials;

- Establish mechanisms for emergency expenditure reimbursements. If local governments are going to assist in Federal emergency response activities, there needs to be a clear path by which those local governments can seek reimbursement for those costs;
- Provide the Council of Government's Senior Policy Group, of which I am a member, direct access to FEMA support representatives during a disaster. Time is of the essence and response time is critical.

V. Challenges Ahead

9/11, Hurricane Isabel, Hurricane Katrina, and the massive crowds of this past Inauguration have all taught us valuable lessons regarding large-scale public safety response. However, if we are to move forward with the entire NCR en-sync, then more coordination will need to be established and critical Federal support can not be stripped away. Does the NCR have a unified alert system? Are all local governments fully interoperable within themselves and all other jurisdictions of the NCR? Does the NCR regularly conduct response drills? Is there a coordinated NCR plan for FEMA, and are all local government entities completely versed with this plan? These are the questions we should be asking moving forward. Prince George's County is prepared to be a leader in answering those questions.

I want to thank the Subcommittee for calling this hearing today and the Chairwoman for allowing us to speak regarding this important matter. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.