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## **BUILDING A 21ST CENTURY INFRASTRUCTURE FOR AMERICA: THE NATIONAL PREPAREDNESS SYSTEM**

### **STATEMENT BY**

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ON BEHALF OF  
THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF MAYORS**

**BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND  
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT  
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVE**

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Chairman Barletta, Ranking Member Johnson, and members of the Committee, I am Catherine Pugh, Mayor of the City of Baltimore. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you on the National Preparedness System and how it has helped my city and region, along with cities across the country to prevent, mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters – both man-made and natural.

We are pleased that this Subcommittee is led by two veterans of local government. Chairman Barletta, we especially appreciate the opportunity to discuss these issues with you, a former mayor. I'm a relatively new mayor, but my colleagues tell me once a mayor, always a mayor and I know you will understand where we are coming from on these issues. And we expect that Ranking Member Johnson, as a former DeKalb County Commissioner who is married to a current one, will also understand our perspective on these issues. It is local first responders who are first on the scene when an event occurs and local officials who manage the response. When an event is big enough we get help from our state and the federal government, but generally that comes later.

My basic message today is that mayors and other local officials across the nation strongly support the existing menu of preparedness programs. As I believe my testimony will show, they are working. We recognize that they may not be perfect and some changes may be needed, but they are the product of years of work by Congress, the Administration, state and local governments, emergency managers, and first responders. The federal grant funds which the Department of Homeland Security through the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) has provided clearly have improved the nation's planning, mitigation, preparedness, prevention, response, and recovery capabilities.

Particularly important is the incentive they provide for federal, tribal, state, territorial and local jurisdictions to work together. By planning, training, and conducting exercises together, local first responders, public health officials, emergency managers, and state and federal officials are able and ready to work together when an incident happens. This pre-planning and coordination prevents confusion, and directly saves lives.

There have been cuts in the funding available through several key programs in recent years and we are alarmed by additional cuts which we hear may be coming. These funding reductions have had and will have a significant impact on our ability to sustain and enhance capabilities – in Baltimore and in cities across the nation. At a time when we see an increase in the number and intensity of natural disasters and an increase in violent extremism and incidents of terrorism – generally homegrown – in our cities, it seems foolhardy to cut back on the federal funding that helps us prevent, mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from these incidents.

### **Increased Local Response Capabilities Resulting from DHS Investments**

#### ***Boston***

The April 15, 2013 bombing at the Boston Marathon continues to provide an excellent example of how DHS investments provided through the Urban Area Security Initiative program have paid off. There can be no doubt that they contributed significantly to the Boston area's quick and effective response to this horrific act of terrorism. Specifically, grant funds were used to:

- **Increase communications interoperability** through the purchase of new portable radios and of new mobile radios for every first responder in the region; the development and maintenance of one of the first shared radio channel plans for public safety first responders (police, fire, and EMS) within the nine cities and towns in the region; the development and support of the Boston Area Ambulance Mutual Aid Radio Network which allowed communications between private ambulance companies and Boston EMS as they treated and transported approximately 282 victims to nearby hospitals; and the development and support of the Boston Area Police Emergency Radio Network which enables most first responders in the region to communicate with agencies from other jurisdictions and during the incident for operational and field communications across jurisdictions after the bombings and for the manhunt operations.
- **Facilitate intelligence and information sharing** by providing salaries for nine intelligence and GIS analysts and equipment (e.g., television screens, computers, surveillance, Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility) within the Boston Regional Intelligence Center (BRIC). These assets were critical in protecting and providing information to the first responders in the field. The analysts monitored, vetted, and triaged information concerning over 280 suspicious or criminal acts within Boston. In addition, they provided risk assessments on potential infrastructure targets, reviewed videos and social media for leads, and coordinated resources. For the presidential visit several days later, the analysts also provided pre-event threat assessments. After the capture of the bombing suspects, the BRIC tracked 42 potential and scheduled events, such as vigils and protests. In addition, BRIC analysts were able to use the Digital Sandbox System, purchased with UASI funds, to build their risk assessment reports.
- **Provide critical infrastructure and key resources**, including 13 Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Detection K-9 Units from Boston, Revere, and Quincy which were deployed and assisted with identifying possible explosive devices and patrolling certain areas during the incident; EOD Personal Protective Equipment which the police departments used to protect their officers; EOD Equipment, including EOD robots which were used to search certain areas and respond to suspicious packages and EOD inspection cameras (night vision monoculars) which helped officers to see during the manhunt that began Thursday night; two Tactical Response Vehicles – Ballistic Engineered Armored Response Counter Attack (BearCat) vehicles – which the Boston Police Department used to protect their SWAT personnel as they patrolled streets, searching for the bombing suspects; and a CBRNE Mobile Command Vehicle which was used to transport Special Operations Division Tactical and Command personnel to the incident site and support on-scene intelligence sharing and investigations among first responders and transmit information to off-site locations. This vehicle was deployed for the marathon event and after the bombings was used for securing the incident site and then was moved to Watertown during the manhunt operations there.
- **Enhance planning and community preparedness** by providing a shelter trailer which was deployed to the family assistance center that served as a shelter on the evening of the bombing; a Mass Notification System, ALERT Boston, which is the city's emergency notification system and which was used to send a message to the public informing them to

shelter-in-place during the manhunt; Variable Message Sign Boards, which were posted at the marathon and in Watertown for the manhunt operations to inform the public of safety messages; and light towers, which were used at the crime scene for evidence collection during the night.

### ***Baltimore***

Since 2003, the Baltimore UASI has invested tens of millions of dollars in preparedness initiatives that have benefited our city and our region. Recent and expected further funding cuts, however, are severely affecting our ability to maintain and build on these investments and cut across law enforcement, fire, health and human services, information technology and the many other public safety services we rely on every day. Within the City of Baltimore they have and will negatively impact the Police Department, Fire Department, Office of Emergency Management, and Department of Health. Among the specific investments these departments have made with these funds are:

- Mass care shelter supplies (cots, blankets, linens, hygiene kits, etc.)
- Emergency notification systems (BEACON, Reverse 911)
- Crisis incident management software (WebEOC)
- Mobile command & communications vehicles (command vehicles)
- HAZMAT prevention & response (chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear & explosive detection equipment)
- Law enforcement protection & response (tactical gear)
- Law enforcement intelligence (license plate readers, CCTV systems, cell phone tracking)
- Emergency management planner personnel

Further, the Emergency Management Performance Grant and other preparedness grant programs have been essential to the staffing and operations of our Office of Emergency Management. That Office is responsible for emergency planning across all mission areas, which requires a high level of organizational, writing, research and intellectual skills to craft policy and develop procedures. These policies and procedures cover both large-scale planning efforts such as mass evacuation as well as the often overlooked and overwhelmingly underfunded area of disaster recovery.

For over 10 years, the City of Baltimore has led the efforts of our regional Maryland Taskforce 2 (MD-TF2) Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) team. The response team is designed to provide a coordinated response to disasters in urban environments. The task force can respond to regional, state, and national disasters, including earthquakes, hurricanes, widespread tornadoes, and manmade and terrorist events within two hours.

MD-TF2 is comprised of 140 personnel on two 70-person teams which are designed to be logistically self-sufficient for the first seven days of operation and able to function for up to 14 days. Each 70-person team is further divided into two groups, each of which operates in 12-hour shifts on a disaster scene. All task force members must be sufficiently cross-trained in search and rescue skill areas to ensure depth of capability and integrated task force operations. MD-TF2 is truly a multi-disciplinary organization that includes six areas of specialists in rescue, medical, hazmat, logistics, technical, and search. Since its inception, MD-TF2 has been deployed on many high-profile statewide and national missions, notably Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and Hurricane

Sandy in 2012. Their deployment to these and many other smaller scale activations has resulted in saving countless lives in Maryland and across the nation.

Unfortunately, due to the drastic funding cuts to the City of Baltimore and the Baltimore UASI, funding to maintain, support, and enhance the MD-TF2 US&R team was eliminated. This has greatly reduced our capabilities to identify all high-risk areas needing to be searched within the first 24 hours, complete 70 percent of the high-risk areas needing lifesaving mass search and rescue operations within the first 48 hours of an incident, and conduct search and rescue operations for 100 percent of the high-risk areas – 60 percent of which are expected to have household pets – during the first 72 hours of an incident. In sum, the cuts to US&R have impacted the team's ability to roster new members, train all members, and properly equip the team with the tools necessary to perform the high-level, high-risk demands of a Type-1 response team.

### **Recommendations to Strengthen the National Preparedness System**

Based on our experiences with the National Preparedness System, America's mayors recommend the following:

- We urge Congress to resist further cuts in preparedness and other homeland security programs. Recent cuts have reduced our capabilities to prevent, mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters – both natural and manmade. Additional cuts would make us weaker, not stronger, further reducing our capabilities at the same time that we are experiencing an increase in the number and intensity of natural disasters and an increase in violent extremism and incidents of terrorism in our cities.
- We also urge you to continue to resist any attempts to consolidate homeland security grants. The grants that are in place provide targeted funding to local areas and critical infrastructure considered to be at the highest risk and have had a huge positive impact on the country's preparedness.
- Recognizing there is always room for improvement, however, we urge that any program reform or changes be consistent with the following principles developed by the U.S. Conference of Mayors and other organizations which represent local governments, first responders, and emergency managers:
  - ***Increase Transparency*** – It must be clear and understandable to the federal government and the public how the states are distributing funds, why they are making these decisions, and where the funds are going.
  - ***Increase Local Involvement*** – Local government officials, including emergency managers and emergency response officials, know best the threats and vulnerabilities in their areas. The Threat Hazard Identification Risk Assessment (THIRA) process must include the input of local elected and emergency response officials, and FEMA must be able to audit states by comparing local risk assessments to the state level THIRA. Further, local governments should have the opportunity to challenge a state THIRA that inadequately reflects their needs or input.

- ***Provide Flexibility with Accountability*** – Any changes to the existing federal grant programs should allow federal funding to meet individual local needs, and preparedness gaps as identified at the local level. Effective but sometimes less politically popular programs, like mitigation, must still receive funding.
  - ***Protect Local Funding*** – Since event impact and response are primarily local in nature, grant funding should support primarily local prevention and preparedness efforts, as is the case under the current program structure. It is important that the vast majority of federal homeland security grants continue to fund local prevention and response activities, including local emergency managers and first responders, and activities that support their preparedness efforts.
  - ***Sustain Terrorism Prevention*** - The current emphasis on supporting law enforcement's terrorism prevention activities must be maintained. The federal grant funds should not be used to support larger state bureaucracies at the expense of operational counter terrorism preparedness, threat analysis, and information sharing activities.
  - ***Provide Incentives for Metropolitan Area Regionalization*** – Homeland security grants must support preparedness in metropolitan intra-state and, where appropriate, inter-state regions.
- We believe that the FEMA Administrator should have emergency management experience at the local level, something which the leaders of this Subcommittee should understand as former local government officials. This is not a position for "on the job training". Disasters do not allow someone time to catch up.
  - While we understand the need to reduce costs, we want you to know that we have significant concerns with the disaster deductible concept that FEMA has proposed. While many details have not yet been developed, it appears at this point that it would shift costs from the federal government to state and local governments and likely further complicate federal-state-local relationships when disasters occur.

## Conclusion

As this Committee examines the National Preparedness System and the suite of preparedness grant programs and possible reforms to them, I urge you to increase, not decrease, local involvement and flexibility. Local officials know best the threats they face, and they know best the gaps which exist in community preparedness. The preparedness grant programs should support primarily local prevention and preparedness efforts since disaster impacts and response are local in nature.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today on this issue of vital importance to me, my city and my region, and to mayors and other local officials across the nation. We look forward to working with you to continue to strengthen the National Preparedness System.