

**Testimony before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental
Affairs;
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and
the District of Columbia**

Preparing the National Capital Region for a Pandemic

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FEMA

Introduction

Good morning Chairman Akaka and Ranking Member Voinovich. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee today to discuss the role of the Office of National Capital Region Coordination (NCRC) within the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and how we work with our homeland security partners at all levels of government and within the private and nonprofit sectors to enhance preparedness within the National Capital Region (NCR). Specifically, I will discuss our role in a variety of on-going pandemic influenza initiatives in the region, which is just one component of our expanding efforts to effectively coordinate critical homeland security initiatives in the NCR.

Background

The NCR is the fourth largest metropolitan area in the United States and encompasses the District of Columbia and 11 local jurisdictions across Maryland and Virginia. It is home to more than 5 million residents and 20 million tourists annually, and is the seat of national government with more than 230 Federal departments and agencies.

Under section 882 of the Homeland Security Act of 2002, as amended the NCRC was created to “oversee and coordinate Federal programs for and relationships with State, local and regional authorities” within this unique region. The office originally served as a staff and resource coordination element within the Office of the Secretary in DHS. However, as a result of the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006, the NCRC became a component of FEMA and reports directly to the Administrator.

To fulfill its mandate, NCRC coordinates daily with local, State, regional, Federal, private sector, and nonprofit entities, to include the Joint Federal Committee, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, the regional Emergency Preparedness Council and the NCR Senior Policy Group – as well as with FEMA Region III, headquartered in Philadelphia. Stakeholders include homeland security advisors, emergency management directors, chief administrative officers, public health officials, first responder leadership, and many others.

Meeting the Pandemic Influenza Challenge

“The Implementation Plan for the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza” defines DHS’ role as being responsible for the coordination of the overall Federal response during an influenza pandemic. FEMA’s role during a pandemic influenza outbreak is to coordinate the identification, mobilization, and deployment of Federal resources to support the life-saving and life-sustaining needs of the States and their populations.

While the NCRC does not lead efforts to create pandemic influenza contingency plans, we coordinate and synchronize Federal interagency planning efforts with NCR jurisdictions. Our coordination efforts ensure complimentary multi-jurisdictional planning for preparedness, response, and recovery actions in the region.

“The NCR Homeland Security Strategic Plan,” which serves as a roadmap for strengthening regional capabilities for a safer and more secure NCR, identifies public health preparedness as one of its primary priorities. Under this strategic framework, the region is engaged in pandemic influenza preparedness actions including integrating plans related to health surveillance, detection, and mitigation between NCR partners.

NCRC Priorities and Pandemic Influenza Preparedness

As the NCRC Director, my goal is to build upon the strong coordination and partnership mechanisms created in the NCR to move our mission forward as a part of FEMA. My priorities reflect emerging regional needs and national policy guidance, with a particular focus on Catastrophic Planning, enhanced Federal Coordination in the NCR, and Regional Risk Assessment.

Catastrophic Planning

NCRC actively advances region-wide catastrophic planning efforts. This office was instrumental in initiating a regional evacuation and planning effort through support and participation on the DC-led NCR Evacuation and Sheltering Plan Working Group, among other efforts. As the New FEMA vision moves forward, we have an opportunity to take a substantial leap in NCR catastrophic planning. By coordinating current State and local

planning efforts with Federal grant funding provided in the recent supplemental appropriation, and the on-going catastrophic planning efforts underway at FEMA, we can bring resources and expertise to bear in a way that was not possible before.

Similarly, NCRC works in close coordination with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), as well as the DHS Office of Health Affairs, the DHS Secretary's pre-designated National Principal Federal Official (PFO) for pandemic influenza, Vice Admiral Vivien Crea, and the regional pre-designated PFOs. As the framework of this Federal partnership matures, we will continue to assist in their efforts to work with Federal, State, regional, and local entities to plan for a pandemic influenza outbreak in the NCR and elsewhere throughout the nation. The pending hire of a Public Health Service Officer specifically to focus on pandemic influenza planning will enhance NCRC's efforts in this regard.

Within the NCR, we will continue to facilitate pandemic influenza planning efforts by bringing together Federal agencies and their State and local counterparts, as we did recently with the Federal Reserve Board and the State of Maryland, Commonwealth of Virginia, and the District of Columbia in a meeting that highlighted key areas of commonality and those that need specific additional planning and action.

Additionally, NCRC will continue integrating pandemic influenza-related matters into major program areas, working with our regional partners. The NCR First Responder Partnership Initiative (FRPI), a landmark credentialing effort, has incorporated Public Health and Medical Services (ESF #8) and pandemic influenza response operations into various demonstrations over the past 2 years. NCRC continues to work with HHS on the credentialing of health care professionals as required by "Implementing the Recommendations of the 9/11 Committee Act of 2007."

Additionally, NCRC and our NCR partners have coordinated or participated in exercises specifically focused on pandemic influenza, including:

- Department of the Treasury Functional Exercise

- Military District of Washington Pandemic Flu Tabletop Exercise
- Nonprofit Roundtable of Greater Washington: Nonprofit Sector Tabletop
- Regional Emergency Preparedness Council Senior Leaders Tabletop Exercise
- “Determined Accord” Tabletop Exercise

Enhanced Federal Coordination

The NCRC’s efforts to significantly strengthen our coordination mechanisms with our Federal partners are also contributing to the region’s pandemic influenza initiatives. For example, we are coordinating FEMA’s National Continuity Programs (NCP), responsible for the enduring continuity of the national government. NCP has disseminated “Continuity of Operations (COOP) Pandemic Influenza Guidance” to more than 70 Federal Departments and Agencies in the NCR. As mentioned, NCP also conducted the COOP tabletop exercise “Determined Accord,” which focused on pandemic planning requirements and capabilities and was conducted in seven sessions within the NCR.

Recognizing that a pandemic influenza outbreak would not be contained within NCR’s borders, we are continuing to integrate the activities of FEMA Region III to jointly advance NCR regional planning efforts. This includes linking key Federal entities into the planning process with Region III State and local entities.

Other Federal coordination has included the General Services Administration in regard to the use of Federal virtual workplaces in the event of a pandemic, and the U.S. Post Office regarding its potential role in distributing prophylaxes. These are just a few examples.

Operationally, the NCR in its standing Federal coordinating role ensures coordination of Federal protective measures and protocols in advance of and immediately upon any event, including pandemic influenza. The NCRC can now leverage FEMA’s forward leaning capabilities to aid in immediate response to include development of a regional common operational picture for the Federal Government, States, and jurisdictions within the region. To accomplish this, the NCRC will leverage existing entities and protocols to facilitate and enable a seamless transition from steady-state operations through incident

management support with the desired end-state of continuous information sharing and incident response among and between our Federal, State, and local partners.

Regional Risk Assessment

The region is committed to building on regional risk assessments that will enable informed resource allocation and subsequently lead to more strategic capability development. We are engaged with the DHS Office of Risk Management and Analysis to assist the region in developing a way forward on a comprehensive and actionable regional risk assessment for the NCR that builds on the data collection efforts of the NCR Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment project. Pandemic influenza preparedness is part of this process, which will lead to a better understanding of the NCR's current readiness and recommendations for managing areas of risk implicated by pandemic influenza.

Conclusion

The NCRC is now at an exciting crossroad as it continues its central preparedness and coordination missions as part of FEMA, and furthers its collaboration efforts with the jurisdictions that comprise the NCR. Building upon the foundation that has already been constructed, NCRC will continue to take proactive steps with our homeland security partners to protect, prepare for, respond to, and recover from the public health threat posed by pandemic influenza.

I would like to thank Chairman Akaka and Ranking Member Voinovich and the Members of the Committee for the opportunity to discuss the role of the FEMA Office of National Capital Region Coordination. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.