

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Homeland Security**  
**Heaing on “PKEMRA Implementation:**  
**“An Examination of FEMA’s Preparedness and Response Mission.”**  
**March 17, 2009**

**Respectfully submitted by Mary Troupe, Executive Director**  
**Mississippi Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities**

**Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, good morning. I am Mary Troupe, Executive Director, Mississippi Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities, and I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you and continue a conversation about the very important issues being explored here today.**

**First, concerning the positive steps that the Post-Katrina Management Reform Act (PKEMRA) has forced FEMA to take.**

**For the Disability Advocacy Community, the establishment of the FEMA position of Disability Coordinator in Section 513 was very important. There were a number of excellent points mandated by the PKEMRA legislation which were key to the effectiveness of this Disability Coordinator position which I want to emphasize:**

**the position was to be appointed by the FEMA Administrator and**

**the position was to report directly to the FEMA Administrator**

**“in order to ensure that the needs of individuals with disabilities are being properly addressed in emergency preparedness and disaster relief.”**

**Also, the ten responsibilities of the Disability Coordinator position required by the PKEMRA legislation guaranteed its effectiveness:**

**“(1) providing guidance and coordination on matters related to individuals with disabilities**

**“(2) interacting with the staff of the Agency, the National Council on Disabilities, the Interagency Coordinating Council on Preparedness and Individuals with Disabilities, other agencies of the Federal Government, and State, local, and tribal government authorities**

**“(3) consulting with organizations that represent the interests and rights of individuals with disabilities about the needs of individuals with disabilities**

**“(4) ensuring the coordination and dissemination of best practices and model evacuation plans for individuals with disabilities;**

**“(5) ensuring the development of training materials and a curriculum for training of emergency response providers, State, local, and tribal government officials, and others on the needs of individuals with disabilities;**

**“(6) promoting the accessibility of telephone hotlines and websites regarding emergency preparedness, evacuations, and disaster relief;**

**“(7) working to ensure that video programming distributors, including broadcasters, cable operators, and satellite television services, make emergency information accessible to individuals with hearing and vision disabilities;**

**“(8) ensuring the availability of accessible transportation options for individuals with disabilities in the event of an evacuation;**

**“(9) providing guidance and implementing policies to ensure that the rights and wishes of individuals with disabilities regarding post-evacuation residency and relocation are respected;**

**“(10) ensuring that meeting the needs of individuals with disabilities are included in the components of the national preparedness system established under section 644 of the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006**

## **Suggested Improvements**

**I will now discuss improvements that can be made to further enhance FEMA's ability to plan for and respond to catastrophic incidents.**

**Establish the FEMA National Disability Coordinator (NDC) with Appropriate Staffing and Parallel Structures: While the Post Katrina Legislation (HR 5441) established a position in Department of Homeland Security (DHS) of the National Disability Coordinator (NDC), that position was placed in FEMA with the Office of Equal Rights.**

**However, the responsibilities envisioned by the legislation far exceed the capabilities of a single individual as is now the case.**

**Additionally, there are frequent concerns being voiced from across the country about the lack of access to the Disability Coordinator, during response and recovery phases of incidents, and the flow of information between the public and private sectors in planning, as well.**

**Further, the legislation mandated that the NDC position report directly to the Administrator in order to ensure that the needs of individuals with disabilities are being properly addressed in emergency preparedness and disaster relief; this is not now the case.**

**Finally, the National Council on Disability (NCD) which is a Federal Agency reports ongoing difficulty in carrying out their Post-Katrina Act obligations, due to FEMA's poor communication and negligible inclusion with it as a partner across all aspects of Emergency Management.**

**I recommend the following:**

**Establish an Office on Disability/ Office of Disability Coordination in FEMA which reports directly to the Administrator with adequate authority, resources and staff for the Disability Coordinator to fulfill the responsibilities of that position as mandated in PKEMRA.**

**Establish additional support within all ten FEMA regions in the form of a Regional Disability Coordinator (RDC)**

**On December 5, 2008, former FEMA Administrator Paulison in a letter accepted this recommendation of his National Advisory Council (NAC); also established in the same legislation) to establish additional support within all ten FEMA regions in the form of a Regional Disability Coordinator (RDC). However these positions will not be funded until FY 2011. A new administration could identify immediate funding to support this structure.**

**Also, creation of a Regional Disability Coordinator position within each of the ten FEMA Regions would appropriately expand and enhance the work of the FEMA Disability Coordinator, both in maintaining relationships with volunteer groups and in coordinating response activities.**

**Several states have a senior level official or office which coordinates with such volunteer groups and the FEMA Disability Coordinator serves as a point of contact for these entities at the federal level. FEMA Regional Disability Coordinators would provide a link between these state and federal networks.**

**Additionally, given the number of open disasters at any particular time, response coordination responsibilities present a significant drain on the time and resources of the FEMA Disability Coordinator.**

**Regional Disability Coordinators would multiply FEMA personnel available to be present in Joint Field Offices to coordinate and support outreach to victims with special needs when disaster strikes.**

**The new administration should also encourage or mandate that each of the FEMA Region Administrators establish a Regional Advisory Council (RAC) to include a Special Needs Subcommittee as former Region II Administrator Steve Kempf, Jr. announced in August 2008. This would mirror the structure already established at the NAC level.**

**Similarly, looking to states such as California, and Florida, the new administration could encourage the Governors of all states to appoint a State Disability/Special Needs Coordinator.**

**And with at least the NDC and the RDC the new administration must ensure the most qualified individuals are selected for these posts by setting a qualification standard (KSA) with the assistance of both representatives of professional emergency management, for example, the International Association of Emergency Managers Special Needs Committee, as well as the disability**

**community. These posts must be administrative with real-world experience applicable to overseeing field operations and operating on a regional basis:**

**Examples of Recommended KSA's to include, but not limited to:**

- **Experience with community organizing**
- **Knowledge of the structure of the disability and other special needs community within the region**
- **Functional and working knowledge of the Emergency Management structure**
- **Worked in an ICS structure regarding how to plug in skill sets and assets and match needs from the ground.**

**Include expertise in emergency preparedness, response and recovery of People with Disabilities on the Domestic Policy Council team and all other areas throughout the administration charged with emergency preparedness.**

**Enhance the composition and authority of the Interagency Coordinating Council formed under Executive Order 13347 to include private sector experts at the table.**

**Disability advocacy leaders from across the country work together on these issues and have asked me to convey their support to you and their willingness to work with this Committee to be part of the solution process; we know that there is no easy single action which will solve all the issues; however, we stress the importance of integration of people with disabilities and special needs in all phases of emergency management at the Federal and the state levels. We must create a fully-inclusive culture of preparedness that respects both the needs and the independence of people with disabilities. There is a need to do more to fulfill both the taxonomy and the spirit of the PKEMRA legislation or PKEMRA becomes merely more glib lip service; I look forward with many committed colleagues to continue this dialog; I respectfully appreciate this opportunity and want you to know that the voice heard today represents many who worked together to focus and prioritize the comments to be most effectively paired with the topic of the hearing.**

**Mary Troupe**  
**Executive Director**  
**Mississippi Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities**  
**2 Old River Place, Suite A**  
**Jackson, MS 39202**  
**601.969.0601**  
**1.800.721.7255**  
**Relay 711**  
**Fax: 601.709.0250**  
**[Mary@msccd.org](mailto:Mary@msccd.org)**  
**[www.msccd.org](http://www.msccd.org)**