American Red Cross
of the National Capital Area

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Before the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure,
Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings and Emergency Management
United States House of Representatives

Introduction

Chairwoman Norton and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, I am honored to appear today on behalf of the American Red Cross of the National Capital Area. My name is Linda Mathes, and I am the Chief Executive Officer of the American Red Cross of the National Capital Area.

For more than 125 years, our nation has relied on the American Red Cross in times of disaster. The Red Cross provides shelter, food, clothing, emotional and other support to those impacted by disasters in communities across the country and around the world. We supply nearly half of the nation's blood. We teach lifesaving skills to hundreds of thousands of people each year, and we support and provide invaluable resources to the members of the military and their families. Whether it is a hurricane or a heart attack, a call for blood or a call for help, the Red Cross is there. The American Red Cross of the National Capital Area, with a ratio of approximately 55 volunteers to each paid staff member, provides relief to victims of disaster and empowers people in our community to prevent, prepare for, and respond to disasters and other life threatening emergencies. The American Red Cross of the National Capital Area ion is responsible for providing services to the following jurisdictions:

- District of Columbia
- Fairfax County, VA (including the cities of Falls Church and Fairfax)
- The City of Alexandria, VA
- Arlington County, VA
- Prince William County, VA (including the cities of Manassas and Manassas Park)
- Loudoun County, VA
- Montgomery County, MD (including the cities of Gaithersburg, Rockville, and Takoma Park)
- Prince George's County, MD (including the cities of Bowie, College Park, Laurel, and Greenbelt)

The issue we are discussing today, "The Disaster Capacity in the National Capital Region: Experiences, Capabilities and Weakness" is of utmost importance to me and my Red Cross colleagues. Due, in large part, to support and funding from the United States Congress, local government, the coordination and collaboration with various nonprofit organizations, support from the business community, and the generous financial and in-kind contributions of the American people, we as a region and a nation have continued to strengthen our ability to respond to disasters.

Brief Overview Of Mass Care And The American Red Cross

In 2008, the American Red Cross of the National Capital Area responded to over 550 disasters of all types including single and multi-family fires, flooding, power outages, and even a hurricane.

In one example, the American Red Cross of the National Capital Area responded to a massive, five-alarm fire that destroyed an entire apartment building in the Mount Pleasant neighborhood of Northwest DC, displacing more than 200 individuals from their homes. During the tragic incident, the local Red Cross provided care and support to the affected families, and continues today to provide follow up services as residents cope with the devastation they experienced. The Chapter spent over $150,000 for food, shelter and medical care.

We rely on a network of nearly 900 trained disaster workers from the local community – the greatest number of them volunteers – who have a deep commitment to helping their neighbors in time of trouble. In addition, the Red Cross has the capacity to manage large numbers of spontaneous volunteers during major incidents. For example, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, when more than 7,000 evacuees found refuge in the metropolitan Washington area, the American Red Cross of the National Capital Area trained and deployed more than 2,000 local volunteers who saw the need and wanted to help. Those volunteers include those who join the relief effort on their own accord, but also through relationships that have been built up between the Red Cross and local churches, synagogues, and mosques, through other community organizations such as Greater DC Cares, 100 Black Men, and the Nonprofit Roundtable and through established relationships the Red Cross has maintained for many years with groups like the Salvation Army, Southern Baptist Convention Disaster Services, and Catholic Charities.

Our model for disaster services is collaborative, diverse, and inclusive; it takes the entire community to deliver an effective response to a large-scale event.

For purposes of my testimony I would like to highlight some important points relative to the American Red Cross of the National Capital Area:

- The Disaster Response Plan of the American Red Cross of the National Capital Area addresses the challenges and opportunities that are unique to the National Capital Region.
- The American Red Cross of the National Capital Area collaborates with nonprofits and government partners, including outreach in emergency preparedness and disaster response to the special needs community, community organizations, faith-based institutions, businesses, and schools.

While we continue to improve upon our state of readiness in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area, we recognize that challenges still exist, and we know that, with added resources, we can expand our reach and improve our ability to best serve the residents, workers, and guests who live in our community.

The American Red Cross Of The National Capital Area Disaster Response Plan

The Emergency Services Program of the American Red Cross of the National Capital Area is designed to provide innovative and effective disaster planning and preparedness that will increase the capability of people and communities to respond and recover from a disaster. This disaster plan:

- Identifies the possible disaster risks within the National Capital Region and their anticipated effects
- Provides the framework for responsive, consistent, and timely relief assistance to those affected by disaster
- Describes the American Red Cross in the National Capital region's capability to respond
- Provides procedures for managing the Red Cross' resource
- Promotes a spirit of cooperation and mutual support between the Red Cross, the community, and local emergency management officials

In accordance with the mission of the American Red Cross, during a disaster relief operation the American Red Cross of the National Capital Area will:

- Provide a safe and supportive environment to meet the needs of residents forced from their homes by the threat or occurrence of a disaster event
- Provide food and other basic recovery items at fixed sites or mobile units throughout the disaster area to support clean up and restoration efforts
- Staff the local government emergency operations centers and contact and/or coordinate with local government and partner relief agencies
- Assess the impact of the disaster
- Conduct public affairs and disaster fundraising activities
- Provide clients with excellent customer service from their first encounter with a Red Cross worker until all of their emergency needs have been met
- Provide information, communication, and reunification to family members separated or out-of-touch due to the disaster event

Hazard Risk Assessment

The Response Plan also identifies the hazards that threaten the chapter's jurisdiction, determines the risk these hazards pose, and assesses the impact of the hazard upon the community. In cooperation with local offices of emergency management, the American Red Cross of the National Capital Area has analyzed the hazard potential for its jurisdictions in order to adequately prepare for disaster response.

Severe Weather (High Probability) - Analysis shows that severe weather, including thunderstorms, snow, and ice storms, blizzards, high wind storms, and tornadoes, is the most significant hazard affecting the National Capital Region. Severe thunderstorms occur frequently in the area and can generate very destructive winds and heavy rains. Historically, thunderstorms occur on an average of 30 days per year. Although they may occur in any month, about 75 percent occur during the months of May through August. In the summer months, severe thunderstorms result in electrical power outages, downed trees, local flooding, flash floods, and property damage. In the winter months, the area is vulnerable to major snowstorms, such as the ice storm of January 2009 and the blizzard of February 2003.

Fires (High Probability) - Fires constitute the next most serious hazard in the jurisdiction. While the probability of a large-scale conflagration engulfing many city blocks is very low, the Chapters in the region do consistently respond to a high number of smaller fires, particularly single family homes, apartments, and other multi-family dwellings. Other potential related risks are industrial and technological hazards, which might include radiological and hazardous materials incidents. The Red Cross has the resources to handle most fire incidents. In 2008, we responded to more than 500 such local disasters, most of which received little or no publicity. The most pressing problem that has arisen in the past is obtaining sufficient hotel rooms in the District of Columbia at the height of tourist season or when a large meeting or convention is taking place in the city.

Transportation Accidents (High Probability) - Transportation accidents represent the third most important hazard. Three large airports (Ronald Reagan National, Baltimore-Washington International Thurgood Marshall, and Dulles International) serve the Washington, DC metropolitan area, as do numerous highways, rail, bus, and subway systems and the navigable waterway of the Potomac River. This extensive transportation network brings people and products, including hazardous materials, into and through the National Capital Region at an ever increasing pace. Many people who live in the surrounding areas enter the District of Columbia in the morning to work and return home in the evening. Tourism, the District's largest industry, also brings 17 million people per year into the city. This heavy volume of traffic makes a transportation accident involving mass casualties a very real possibility. The Red Cross has sufficient resources to support local officials in response to a

transportation accident. These incidents often only require a short term response involving the normal range of Red Cross services.

Special Events (Medium Probability) - The National Capital Region, in particular Washington, DC, has a long history of large gatherings of people for various purposes, including peaceful demonstrations, protest marches, and planned and unplanned acts of civil disobedience, as well as periodic celebrations such as the Independence Day fireworks and the recent Presidential Inaugural. All such gatherings present some level of risk. The American Red Cross in the National Capital Region routinely staffs the District of Columbia Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency's Emergency Operations Center during such events and has contingency plans in place should an incident occur. The American Red Cross in the National Capital Region has the resources to staff that EOC and other emergency operations centers throughout the region with a trained Red Cross government liaison to better interface and collaborate with our government partners.

Terrorism (High Probability) - The National Capital Area faces growing and increasingly serious threats related to various types of terrorism. As the Nation's Capital, the District of Columbia is the primary seat of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government as well as much of the command structure for the nation's defense. This geographic area contains many potential targets that would result in a special impact, both locally and nationally. Potential targets include monuments, landmarks, military installations, government and public buildings, and softer targets such as hotels and large buildings where people work and live.

American Red Cross Services

The Disaster Response Plan of the American Red Cross in the National Capital Region provides direction for the provision of specific services following a disaster including:

Sheltering - Well-identified shelters are often the first sign of relief efforts to people in affected communities. These facilities address basic human needs for food and shelter, and their prompt establishment is essential. Sheltering people affected by disaster may include congregate sheltering in facilities such as schools, churches, or other large facilities, or the use of commercial facilities, such as motels and hotels, as shelters for individuals or families. Shelters may be opened in anticipation of a disaster, during an evacuation, or after a disaster occurs. The Red Cross usually initiates sheltering activities in coordination with government and/or emergency management or with other community organizations.

Through effective partnerships, the Red Cross also engages community agencies and their resources to ensure that shelters meet the needs of individual communities, their residents, and the various partner agencies that may provide sheltering assistance in an emergency. In certain instances, the Red Cross may be asked to provide shelter for rescue workers and similar groups when housing is unavailable through the organization the workers represent. Congregate housing may also be required for Red Cross disaster staff when other housing in the disaster-affected area is limited or at the onset of an event. With the support of Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) grant funding in recent years the American Red Cross in the National Capital Region has expanded its capacity to shelter affected individuals to 15,000, including supplies for over 600 people with disabilities. These supplies were available during the aftermath of the flooding caused by Hurricane Hanna just last year in northern Virginia. These supplies are stored in a warehouse and forward deployed in 56 trailers throughout the region. The Red Cross has surveyed shelter spaces for 56,000 individuals, or 112,000 individuals in an evacuation situation.

Feeding - The Red Cross will provide regular meals in its shelters as well as emergency feeding through mobile distribution and additional fixed sites for affected families and individuals and workers throughout the affected area. Food service may also be provided for emergency workers or other groups providing disaster relief at the discretion of the administering unit. Mobile feeding is critical to meeting the immediate needs of affected communities and establishing the presence of Red Cross relief efforts. It is provided from vehicles to affected families and individuals and relief workers

returning to and cleaning up disaster-damaged homes. Mobile feeding may also be provided in instances of severe disruption to power and other utilities. With UASI support and increased partnerships throughout the community, we have increased our immediately accessible feeding capacity to 35,000 meals per day and have recently partnered with the Pennsylvania Avenue Baptist Church in the District of Columbia to host a Disaster Kitchen Training course during the recent regional leadership training conference to increase local capacity to cook and serve safe, nutritious meals during an emergency situation.

Bulk Distribution - In some disasters, essential items that clients need to assist their recovery might not be immediately available in the local area. In such cases, the Red Cross will initiate distribution of items such as comfort kits, clean up kits, water, ice, shovels, insect repellant, or other items that may be needed. The Red Cross determines appropriate distribution items to meet client's needs based on the circumstances of the event in coordination with community partners and government. When bulk distribution is appropriate, prompt action to procure and mobilize the needed resources is essential because the window for providing such assistance to clients is often very short.

Disaster Health Services - The relief operation ensures appropriate health care workers are available at shelters, emergency aid stations, feeding sites, and other service delivery sites as needed. The initial focus is on the direct needs of disaster victims and emergency workers, including Red Cross paid and volunteer staff, although most staff health needs will be handled by Staff Health Services.

Disaster Mental Health Services - Mental health services are provided at service delivery sites and other appropriate settings to people affected by the disaster. The Red Cross supports and assists community mental health providers in meeting the needs of disaster victims. Because mental health services may be provided only by licensed or certified mental health professionals, the relief operation must prioritize this service to locations of greatest need until additional resources are available.

Individual Client Services - At the onset of a disaster relief operation, the Red Cross immediately starts planning for the delivery of individual assistance. Although some types of assistance depend on an accurate assessment of the damage, individual assistance must be initiated as soon as possible. Individual assistance is accomplished by identifying the pressing needs of the client, be they clothing, medicines, eyeglasses, etc, and providing the capacity for the client to replace those items. Assistance is based solely on need and is completely free to the client.

Safe And Well Information - Chapter paid and volunteer staff responds to calls from concerned family members and provide information about available resources that can help families communicate with one another during times of emergency. In addition, Red Cross staff process requests that focus on those family members who have serious health problems and are in an area affected by a disaster. Within the disaster affected area and through the use of tools like our *Safe and Well* website, the Red Cross helps individuals and family members to communicate with family and friends outside of the affected area.

Outreach to the Special Needs Community

In developing mass care and sheltering capacity throughout the community, the American Red Cross in the National Capital Region works with the National Organization on Disabilities (NOD) to ensure that services and shelters are accessible to people with disabilities. Some of the results of our collaboration include:

- Reviewing all our shelter surveys for ADA compliance
- Identifying in general, and on specific location levels, how we can best set up our shelters to be more accommodating to people with special needs
- Working with NOD and other subject matter experts (including experts from FEMA, Maryland Department of Disabilities, Assistive Technology Industry Association, and the Spinal Cord Injury

Association) to identify specific items that need to be available in shelters to make them more accessible to people with disabilities

Additionally, the American Red Cross in the National Capital Region worked with the District's Office of Disability Rights to help coordinate the ADA requirements for the inaugural events with all agencies of the DC Government and Federal partners, and we ensured that all shelters opened for the Inauguration were ADA compliant.

With our other chapter partners, we are working to coordinate and expand our language bank to be sure that we have the capacity to effectively communicate with those with limited skills in English. Currently, we have the capacity to translate in more than 15 languages, but for a metropolitan area where five times that number of languages are spoken, there is still much to do.

Nonprofit Community, Government And Other Partner Collaboration

The nonprofit community in this region is better prepared than we were in 2001. In September 2003, the Greater Washington Task Force on Nonprofit Emergency Preparedness developed *"A Blueprint for Emergency Preparedness by Nonprofits."* As identified in the report, the nonprofit sector is crucial to a comprehensive emergency preparedness and operations. Furthermore, the nonprofit, public, and private sectors are part of a three-legged stool of effective emergency response and mass care planning. To this end, I would like to highlight and comment on some of the *Blueprint's* specific goals:

- To build on and reinforce collaboration among nonprofits
- To ensure coordination with other sectors and geographies
- To create transparency and ensure accountability throughout the sector
- To be flexible enough to respond to changing needs and to innovations in service delivery and resource intermediation
- To be generic enough to apply to a variety of communities

The American Red Cross of the National Capital Area staffs the local Emergency Operation Center(s) (EOC) with Red Cross Government Liaisons who collaborate with their government and nonprofit agency counterparts for the appropriate resources needed for the operation. This staffing provides a direct link between the government agency most directly responsible for the event and the Red Cross and the resources that we can bring to bear to support that government agency.

The Red Cross takes a lead role in actively working with the local VOADs (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster), which are coalitions of independent voluntary agencies that meet regularly to ensure a coordinated community response that addresses the needs of victims and minimizes overlap of services in the event of a disaster. There is no formal system for requests for assistance; rather the VOAD leadership is contacted with the request by phone.

The Red Cross is also involved with the local FEMA Emergency Food & Shelter Program Boards in the jurisdictions. This program supplements the work of local social service organizations within the local areas, both private and governmental, to help people in need of emergency assistance.

The American Red Cross of the National Capital Area also serves as the coordinating agency for the National Capital Area Case Management Cooperative (CMC) for nonprofit agencies providing long-term case management for disaster victims. I am charged with calling for the activation of the CMC to assist with the long term case management of the disaster victims and can also activate the Coordinated Assistance Network (CAN) during a disaster relief operation.

I am pleased that the American Red Cross of the National Region is playing a significant leadership role in the community to foster a partnership around emergency preparedness and response. Specifically, I serve as the Chair of the Regional ESF-6 Committee for Mass Care, Housing, and Human Services. In addition, the American Red Cross of the National Capital Area serves as a member of several Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments committees including the regional preparedness

working group and the human services group. Dr. Joseph Sciuto, Senior Director, Emergency and International Services, and I work closely with all of the Emergency Managers in the region to coordinate on key issues, such as preparation for any contingency that may have occurred during the 56th Presidential Inaugural. Other partnerships include the following:

- Chapter staff sat on the US Secret Service and DC presidential inaugural committees.
- Chapter staff continue to sit on USSS Health and Medical Subcommittee for National Special Security Events in the National Capital Region.
- We have initiated and expanded our collaboration with DC government on the development of shelter planning. We are currently planning a joint tabletop exercise with DC to further refine shelter plans.
- We provide support to the DC National Guard during major special events including setting up canteens and warming shelters during the inauguration.
- We worked with Save the Children to provide support kits for children in shelters during the inauguration. This partnership is ongoing to provide children's shelter kits throughout the region should shelters become necessary.
- We are currently working on Memoranda of Understanding with FEMA Region III to access equipment and supplies from FEMA stockpiles during an incident.

Many other organizations and agencies provide disaster relief and support and the American Red Cross of the National Capital Area establishes strong partnerships with these agencies to coordinate disaster activities for the maximum benefit of the affected people and communities.

To ensure effective disaster readiness and response, the Red Cross has established relationships with partner community agencies. While our national headquarters seeks out and negotiates partnerships with national-level agencies and organizations, our local chapters make those partnerships come alive by establishing and nurturing local relationships.

Opportunities And Challenges Impacting The American Red Cross Of The National Capital Area

The Red Cross has made substantial progress addressing the many issues of complex disasters. Through our relationship with our national office and a network of chapters throughout the country, resources can be diverted to the Washington area in the event of a major calamity. Nevertheless, the level of resources locally is limited and a number of challenges still exist.

- As an organization dependent upon contributions from the public, the availability of funding limits the progress we can make. We have been fortunate and very grateful for the support of the Congress in funding preparedness through UASI. We have received grant money that has allowed us to acquire nearly 70 vehicles devoted to disaster response. Trailers, outfitted with shelter supplies are strategically placed in some 56 areas around the region. Trucks are available to transport more supplies. Some stockpiles of meals, cots, and blankets, water and clean up kits, and other disaster supplies are available locally, but they will accommodate only a small percentage of the potential need in the event of a major disaster. The funding and that of some corporate partners has allowed us to stand up a state of the art Regional Disaster Coordination Center at our facility in Fairfax. It has provided for Mobile Command Centers, one for each side of the river.

- Volunteers are the backbone of the system of support the American Red Cross can provide. The ability to recruit and train more volunteers and to turn them loose on a community that must prepare itself is critical to long term success in surviving a major calamity. We continue to need to recruit and train more volunteers, first to prepare them to provide service in the event of a disaster, but also to saturate the community with the training and support to allow people to prepare themselves and their families. A region-wide communication campaign can provide the backdrop to encourage people to join the fight for ultimate preparedness.

- Supplies are a key to immediate response. Although we currently have the supplies available, they are warehoused in a facility with a lease that will expire shortly. It is critical that the warehousing capacity handle up to 30,000 square feet of supplies and we are interested in building pre-fab warehouses that are immune to leases and unpredictable agreements with corporate or government partners.

Ready Rating Program

In February 2008, the St. Louis Area Chapter of the American Red Cross launched the *Red Cross Ready Rating Program*, designed to engage and guide local businesses, schools, and organizations to prepare for disasters and other emergencies. This membership program is currently being pilot tested in the St. Louis area, and I am hopeful the District of Columbia can launch a similar program in the near future.

By signing a membership agreement, participants commit to take steps to become better prepared within a year. They then utilize an online questionnaire tool that helps them assess their disaster vulnerabilities and discover where they "rate" in the process of developing and implementing an emergency response plan. Once they understand their level of preparedness and what still needs to be done to be fully aligned with the program, the website offers information and examples to help achieve their goals.

This program encourages community preparedness in multiple ways. Participating members receive a *Ready Rating* Member Seal to display on their websites or otherwise show that they are committed to being more prepared. Part of their evaluation "rating" looks at the group's actions and effectiveness when it comes to encouraging and strengthening disaster preparedness within their own community. In effect, this helps groups look beyond their immediate preparedness needs to identify ways they can help their communities get better prepared, such as holding a blood drive. Additionally, membership is renewed annually and based on continual improvements in preparedness from one year to the next. Since the project's launch in St. Louis in February, 37 groups have signed on to this program including 11 businesses, 18 schools and 8 community organizations.

Conclusion

To summarize, Madam Chairwoman, I am confident that we as a region and as a nation are better prepared for disasters than at any time in our history, but we have more work to do. The goal of the American Red Cross is to ensure that every family, every business, every school, every faith-based and community organization is prepared for disasters and life-threatening emergencies. With your support and that of the United States Congress we can and must reach that goal. Thank you.