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TESTIFYING ON BEHALF OF

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Subcommittee on Economic Development,
Public Buildings and Emergency Management

Improving the Nation's Response to Catastrophic Disasters:
How to Minimize Costs and Streamline Our Emergency Management Programs

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Chairman Denham, Ranking Member Holmes Norton, and members of the Sub-committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony on how we can work together to improve catastrophic disaster response efforts while minimizing economic impacts.

As the Acting Secretary of the California Emergency Management Agency (Cal EMA), I have the overarching responsibility to ensure that California works to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and quickly recover from any type of disaster that may impact California, whether man-made or naturally occurring. Cal EMA coordinates emergency activities to save lives and reduce property losses during disasters and works to expedite recovery from the effects of disasters. On a day-to-day basis, Cal EMA provides the leadership, assistance, and support to state and local agencies in

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planning and preparing for the most effective use of federal, state, local, and private sector resources in emergencies.

I want to begin by saying that our thoughts are with the people of Japan as they overcome the devastating impacts of the 9.0 earthquake, the tsunami and the impacts of their ongoing nuclear emergency. In the wake of this event, I want to emphasize the importance of planning and preparedness efforts in mitigating the costs associated with responding to catastrophic disasters.

Chairman Denham, as a representative from California, you know how vulnerable California is to disasters such as fires, floods, and earthquakes, and how devastating these types of events are to our state and national economies. We have learned from our experiences in California that one of the best ways to help mitigate the effects of a large-scale disaster is to invest in preparedness efforts. If we focus our investments on disaster preparedness efforts, we reduce the devastation of human suffering and financial losses in the future. We must invest financial resources on the front end in an effort to ensure that our infrastructure is secure, that early warning systems are in place, and that the public is informed about the potential risks and have the tools to prepare themselves and their families for when a disaster strikes.

Even during these difficult economic times, Cal EMA and our local partners have taken tremendous steps to : enhance our emergency notification systems; create a disaster exercise program that tests operational capabilities; launch a program to get families involved in disaster preparedness and create resiliency in our communities, including the promotion of volunteerism; create an environment whereby businesses can partner with government; focus our planning on the unique challenges of catastrophic disasters, similar to what was just experienced in Japan; and reinforce our efforts to support the state's mutual aid system.

The following are highlights of some of the efforts undertaken by Cal EMA and our state and local partners in these areas:

ENHANCED EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION SYSTEMS

A core responsibility of public agencies is to ensure that our communities are aware of disasters so that individuals, families and businesses can take the appropriate and necessary actions.

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To that end, we have focused some of our limited resources on enhancing and maintaining our ability to alert and warn the public during times of emergencies and disasters.

Specifically, Cal EMA operates the California State Warning Center, which is staffed 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to serve as the official state level point of contact for emergency notifications. The warning center personnel maintain contact with county warning points, state agencies, federal agencies and the National Warning Center in Berryville, Virginia. Through multiple communication channels, Cal EMA ensures that developing emergencies are responded to quickly and effectively. Last year, Cal EMA's warning center staff handled nearly 150,000 calls, including reports of more than 11,000 hazardous material spills and 140 seismic and tsunami events. Between January 2009 and December 2010 more than 650,000 alert and warning notifications were made for 45 major disasters to local, state and federal agencies and public-private partners.

In light of the recent earthquake that occurred across the Pacific Ocean, but still had significant impacts to California, the ability to warn the public regarding seismic events and tsunamis remains a concern and a priority. Depending on the location of an earthquake, a tsunami has the potential to reach the California coast in as little as ten minutes. Because of the potential short time period for issuing a warning, and the need to identify the areas of the state which may be impacted by a surge, Cal EMA, in partnership with California Geological Survey and the Tsunami Research Center at the University of California, developed statewide tsunami inundation maps for California. The maps are used by coastal communities to plan and coordinate their specific emergency evacuation plans. When the tsunami warning was issued on March 11, 2011, Cal EMA immediately contacted the coastal county offices of emergency services that were then able to use the tsunami maps to focus their efforts for response and evacuation.

Local governments have the primary responsibility of alerting their residents to impending events, however we provided federal grant funds to every county in the state so that they could install telephone notifications systems, such as reverse 911, so that they could rapidly notify people. Wise investments in local tsunami warning systems saved lives and property and mitigated the damaging effects of the recent tsunami. But, as you know, plans are only as good as the actions taken by the individuals who use them, and that is why California remains focused on creating a culture of preparedness. Last week, March 20, 2011 through March 26, 2011, was National Tsunami

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Awareness and Preparedness Week, and we used that opportunity to promote the importance of preparedness and personal responsibility in disaster planning.

EXERCISES

Disaster planning is important, but in order to truly prepare and measure our ability to respond to disasters, we have implemented an aggressive training and exercise program in California. For instance, we created The Golden Guardian Full Scale Exercise Series to exercise and assess emergency operations plans, policies, and procedures for all-hazards / catastrophic incidents at the local, regional, and state levels. Golden Guardian was first implemented in 2004 and has become the largest statewide exercise series in the country. The next iteration of Golden Guardian will take place between May 17, 2011 and May 19, 2011, and will focus on a major California flood scenario. The exercise will involve participants from federal, state, and local agencies, along with non-governmental organizations and private sector partners. Future Golden Guardian scenarios will focus on exercising our response and recovery efforts associated with a catastrophic earthquake scenario in both Southern California and the San Francisco Bay Area. Exercises like Golden Guardian are costly, but we believe they will save lives and reduce damages during times of disaster.

CITIZEN PREPAREDNESS

One of the key findings of the 911 Commission was that people in their homes and businesses are the true first responders. Individual citizens and businesses will often be the ones to first help themselves, their neighbors, and their employees during disasters. Even with the most robust emergency response system, government agencies can sometimes take several days before they can render assistance following a catastrophic disaster, as we have recently witnessed in Japan. In order to bolster individual disaster readiness, California has implemented several initiatives.

Annually in October, we conduct The Great California Shake-Out Drill. Through various outreach efforts, we focus our attention on what could happen during a significant earthquake and how Californians can best prepare. As part of the drill, Californians practice the “drop, cover and hold on” exercise and are encouraged to secure furniture, water heaters, electronics and vulnerable structures; prepare an emergency plan for themselves and their families; and to gather essential emergency supplies. The exercise involves businesses, school districts, state and local governments

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and numerous non-profit agencies throughout all of California's counties, and in 2010 more than 7.9 million people participated at home, work and school by practicing "drop, cover, and hold on".. The goal for the 2011 drill is to have more than 10 million people simultaneously "drop, cover, and hold on."

Volunteers have always been important to emergency response, but with shrinking agency budgets, volunteers take on increasingly important roles. California is the only state with a cabinet level agency established solely to promote and organize volunteerism. CaliforniaVolunteers administers California's "We Prepare" program, which is designed to motivate families to take action and get prepared for both natural and man-made disasters. The cornerstone of the program is an online customizable family disaster plan and a personalized children's book available at CaliforniaVolunteers.org. CaliforniaVolunteers has also created the Disaster Corps, which consists of volunteers with enhanced training and skills that can be used in disasters to organize and deploy other volunteers, thereby increasing public safety and reducing the demands on government emergency responders.

Knowing what risks you might be faced with is a significant component to preparing for disaster and that is why. Cal EMA has developed several web-based tools to inform Californians about hazards in their own neighborhoods and, more importantly, what they can do to mitigate their risks. Our interactive website, MyHazards.org, allows Californians to access potential hazard risk information,, such as earthquake and flood risk, within their neighborhoods and includes mitigation information to help reduce their risks.

LEVERAGING PUBLIC/PRIVATE/NON-PROFIT PARTNERSHIPS

Businesses play a vital role assisting government agencies by providing goods and services during times of disasters and are essential to the economic recovery efforts after a disaster strikes. To foster partnerships with our business partners, California has established the following programs:

- (1) Cal EMA has developed formal relationship with businesses in the retail, banking, and telecommunications industries. These formal relationships, usually through memorandum of

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understandings, have led to coordination and communications efforts that will benefit all parties during an emergency.

- (2) Businesses in California have repeatedly offered assistance within their communities during disasters, but unfortunately, as a result of their goodwill efforts, they have been subjected to legal liability and lawsuits. Therefore, we statutorily created a business registry program in California that substantially protects those businesses that register on-line from tort liability.
- (3) Day to day and during disasters, the non-profit organizations in our communities, such as churches and food banks, provide critical services. Cal EMA recently adopted regulations that allow us to provide funding to these non-profit organizations, which provide essential services during a disaster at the request of local governments.

FOCUSED PLANNING FOR CATASTROPHIC DISASTERS

Even with severely constrained budgets, there remains a need for comprehensive planning for disasters of all types. To best leverage resources and recognize how a catastrophic disaster could create a long-term disruption to lives, businesses, and the state's economy, we have focused both state and federal planning resources on two major planning efforts, the Bay Area Catastrophic Plan and the Southern California Catastrophic Earthquake Response Plan.

Bay Area Catastrophic Plan: The San Francisco Bay Area Earthquake Readiness Response: Concept of Operations Plan (Plan) describes the joint state and federal response to a catastrophic earthquake in the Bay Area. While the Plan was developed specifically for a catastrophic 7.7 to 7.9 magnitude earthquake along the San Andreas fault in Northern California, it is applicable to any catastrophic earthquake in the Bay Area. It is designed to be used by emergency managers at all levels and is intended to support elected officials at the local, state and federal levels by providing the mechanisms to engage with disaster response and management officials making informed and effective decisions.

Southern California Catastrophic Earthquake Response Plan: On December 14, 2010, Cal EMA and FEMA formally adopted the Southern California Catastrophic Earthquake Response Plan, a multi-jurisdictional, scenario-based plan for response to, and recovery from, a catastrophic earthquake in Southern California. The focus of the plan is on addressing the highest, most critical and widespread consequences of mass casualties, tremendous shelter and housing needs,

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infrastructure calamity, and enormous economic disruption. The plan is realistic, flexible and scalable, and will no doubt save lives when the catastrophic disaster occur.

MUTUAL AID OR NEIGHBOR HELPING NEIGHBOR

The bedrock of our emergency response system in California is our mutual aid system established in the 1950's. It's a simple concept of one jurisdiction being legally bound to all the other jurisdictions in the state to provide assistance during a disaster. We have learned some valuable lessons over the years, including that there are disasters, like the floods of 1997 that impacted all jurisdictions in a state and that catastrophic events in urban areas, like the Northridge earthquake in Los Angeles that could limit the ability of local emergency resources and would require the help of rural and more distant resources.. Therefore, it is essential that we enhance the emergency response capacities of all jurisdictions if we want to be truly prepared for catastrophic disasters. For example, in California we are fortunate to have eight Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) Teams that are primarily located in large urban areas. But, it is equally important to build the capacities of the heavy rescue teams in the dozens of other jurisdiction in the state, as a catastrophic earthquake, a massive flood, a tsunami impact, or a terrorist attack would require significant resources.

INVESTMENTS ARE NECESSARY

We believe California has made substantial progress by leveraging our available resources, but we must sustain, and even increase, our investments in order to ensure that we can respond to and quickly recover from disasters.

Mitigation: FEMA-commissioned study concluded that for each dollar spent on mitigation activities, an average of \$4 in post-disaster costs is saved. Pre-Disaster Mitigation focuses on projects that address natural or man-made hazards in order to reduce the risks to the population and structures. Post-Disaster Mitigation efforts are designed to reduce future damage in a stricken area and decrease the loss of life and property due to incidents.

Hazard Reduction Programs: U.S. Senators Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein have introduced the National Hazards Risk Reduction Act of 2011, which will help improve our preparedness for earthquakes and violent windstorms, including supporting research into advance

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warning systems, improved building codes and other efforts to reduce risks and damage from natural disasters. We believe support for this program could be critical to public safety in California. We have developed a warning system for tsunamis in California, but unlike Japan, we do not have a fully integrated early warning system for earthquakes. We cannot predict earthquakes, but technology exists (and is being used in Japan) that would enable us to give the public and emergency responders a few seconds of warning before an earthquake hits their area, so industrial systems can be safely shut-down, emergency vehicles mobilized, or dangerous medical procedures stopped. This type of system could saving thousands of lives and reduce the cost of disaster recovery.

The legislation will also reauthorizes the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program (NEHRP), which assesses new and existing earthquake hazards, improves building codes and works to decrease the damage of seismic activity by assessing our overall vulnerability. The program was first authorized in 1977 and has led to significant improvements in earthquake research and prediction and infrastructure preparedness in California and other states with an earthquake risk.

Sustainment: Since the attacks of 9/11, and the various federal grant programs that became available to better prepare our nation, we have clearly enhanced our disaster preparedness, but with reductions in state and local budgets, and proposals to substantially reduce the federal budget for these programs, we risk the losing much of the benefit that were achieved with these investments.

The reductions have direct impact on programs, for example the Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) teams that we all saw operating in Japan are underfunded. Local governments and states can no longer supplant the funding of these teams. No state, including California, wants to walk away from the US&R partnership that has proven itself so valuable.

CONCLUSION

As stated previously, it is critical to our efforts to mitigate the risks of disasters by continuing to invest in early warning systems, develop the essential emergency preparedness plans, and educate the public on the ways in which they can best be prepared. California continues to be recognized as a national leader in emergency management and with your support we will continue to work tirelessly to advance efforts which we believe will provide the greatest benefits for our state and nation. Because of your previous support, California's communities are safer, have the best trained and equipped first responders, and continue to move forward with a number of important

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initiatives and I urge Congress to continue to dedicate funding towards these efforts. Thank you for this opportunity.