



Testimony of

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Buildings and Emergency Management**

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and Cutting Costs”**

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Chairman Denham, Ranking Member Norton, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony today and to offer my perspective based upon efforts and experiences in California.

I would like to acknowledge the Chairman’s commitment towards enhancing preparedness efforts at all levels of government in which your leadership has paid significant dividends towards ensuring our communities are better prepared to endure an emergency.

As Acting Secretary of the California Emergency Management Agency (Cal EMA), I am responsible for coordinating the State’s overall preparedness efforts and enhancing our prevention, protection, mitigation, response and recovery capabilities for both intentional and natural calamities. Cal EMA coordinates homeland security and emergency activities to save lives and reduce property losses during disasters and works to expedite recovery from the effects of disasters. This daunting task becomes even more so during these tough economic times. In fact, just within the last two years alone, California has endured significant and multiple natural

disasters as the result of severe winter storms, flooding, mudslides, fires, drought, heavy rains, and earthquakes. Since January 2010, California has received four major federal disaster declarations in which more than 75 percent of California's population is covered under at least one of those declarations with a combined total of more than \$236 million in eligible damages statewide and we continue to struggle to cope with the financial implications.

We have learned from our experiences in California that in order to help mitigate the effects of a large-scale disaster, whether intentional or not, we must invest in overall 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, together with our partners, we have taken tremendous steps to enhance our emergency notification systems, create a disaster exercise program that tests operational capabilities, encourage personal preparedness to create resiliency in our communities, create an environment whereby businesses can partner with government, focus our planning on the unique challenges of catastrophic disasters, and reinforce our efforts to support the state's mutual aid system. Despite all these efforts, we can only accomplish so much without federal support. That is why now, more than ever, it is critical for us to know that we can count on our federal partners to work together with us in an effort to ensure the efficient, effective, and sustained operations of our emergency management efforts.

It is truly indisputable as to how vulnerable California is to both intentional and natural disasters and the significant risk that such threats pose to the economies of the state and to the nation. California, unlike almost any other state, is faced with the greatest risk of suffering a catastrophic event such as a large-scale earthquake, significant wildland-urban interface fires, a major urban area flood, or a terrorist attack using weapons of mass destruction based upon our unique entry points. California's risks are unique and underscore the unparalleled need for federal investments in preparedness efforts.

California's overall preparedness system is comprised of five mission areas: prevention, protection, mitigation, response and recovery. In all of these mission areas, Cal EMA strives to

build a streamlined system that will reduce the impacts of both natural and intentional disasters. I would like to briefly highlight California's efforts in these preparedness mission areas and suggest how the federal government could enhance our overall efforts.

Prevention Mission Area

The cornerstone of California's terrorism prevention strategy continues to focus on efforts to deter and disrupt criminal activities before they occur by facilitating information sharing among federal, state and local law enforcement agencies. To counter the terrorist threat to the homeland, California continues to rely on a network of fusion centers to detect and prevent threats from al-Qa'ida, its global followers and homegrown jihadists. Our state and four regional fusion centers analyze disparate pieces of information in an effort to identify possible pre-indicators of terrorist activity and share the analyses with the national intelligence community. California's fusion centers also train and enlist terrorism liaison officers, who are our front line defense in disrupting terrorist plots. To be effective, fusion centers must be fully staffed with well-trained personnel and must enlist active participation from local public safety agencies to sustain a robust network. Like most areas of government, budget constraints have impacted our fusion centers and for this reason, it would be wise to allow state and local governments to use federal grant funds to sustain previous investments in both facility and personnel costs.

Protection Mission Area

California has a strong commitment to prevention and protection programs; however, it has become increasingly difficult to maintain such a commitment when California has experienced a decrease in federal funding and an elimination of federally funded programs. Under federal grant programs between 2010 and 2011, California received eighteen percent less in federal grant funding for homeland security programs and endured more than a \$10 million loss to preparedness programs as a result of FEMA's elimination of the Buffer Zone Protection Program (BZPP) and the Interoperable Emergency Communications Grant Program (IECGP). Furthermore, an additional loss of more than \$7.5 million in funding this last fiscal year was the result of three existing Urban Area Security Initiatives (UASI) being denied funding. However, over this same time period in which states experienced a decrease in federal grant funding,

FEMA actually received a funding increase from 4 percent to 5.8 percent of their Management and Administration (M&A). FEMA was provided more money to manage and administer grant programs when states were given less money, which means there was actually less work for FEMA to manage and administer, yet FEMA received an increase in funding.

Instead of reducing the funding at the state and local levels, funding should be at a minimum sustained. In addition, the allowances for construction costs to protect and mitigate hazards as well as to harden critical sites should be allowed and funded.

Mitigation Mission Area

As I am sure you are all aware, FEMA commissioned a study that concluded that for each dollar spent on mitigation activities, an average of \$4 in post-disaster costs is saved. Mitigation efforts can include both pre- and post-disaster mitigation. Pre-disaster mitigation focuses on projects to reduce the risks to the population and to structures based upon hazards that exist. However, post-disaster mitigation efforts are designed to reduce future loss of life or damage in an already stricken area.

I am deeply concerned about how several critical pre-disaster and hazard mitigation grant projects throughout the State of California have been delayed at the federal level. Specifically, more than twenty projects totaling more than \$20 million, which date back to 2005, have not been fully approved by FEMA. In the absence of a concerted effort to remove unduly and burdensome bureaucratic hurdles, many of our communities remain vulnerable to a catastrophe that we are trying to mitigate with either pre-disaster or hazard mitigation grants. I cannot emphasize enough how important it is that the environmental and judicial review processes of critical mitigation projects be streamlined and that FEMA be provided the adequate resources to quickly review and act upon mitigation projects.

Response Mission Area

The bedrock of our emergency response system in California is our mutual aid system, which was established in the 1950s. 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 valuable lessons over the years, which have reinforced the essential need to enhance the

emergency response capacities of our first responders to ensure that we are able to effectively respond during a catastrophic incident.

With wildland fires being one of the most detrimental threats and realities facing California on a continuous basis, ensuring that we have enough first responders to respond to a fire is critical. With nearly 6,000 fires and more than 1.3 million acres burned in California in one year alone, the threat and impact of fires in California is undisputable. In fact, seven of the top ten largest wildland fires in the United States have occurred in California, with sustained damages of \$8.4 billion, which equates to approximately seventy-nine percent of the \$10.6 billion in damages nationwide. California is appreciative of the federal assistance received through the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program, which assists local jurisdictions with firefighting and emergency response needs. Unfortunately though, funding through the AFG program is not based upon risk, or even a population based formula. California's level of assistance under the program is simply insignificant. For instance, last year alone California experience more than 134,000 acres burned as the result of wildland fires, however on average only received \$5.92 per capita¹ through the AFG program while states such as Maine, which experienced roughly 318 acres burned last year, received an average of \$41.31 per capita in AFG funding. The AFG program should allow states to apply for funding to purchase the equipment necessary for the initial attack phase, and ultimately will reduce costs associated with damages from the incidents. Funds through the program should be allocated to the areas of the country with higher risk of catastrophe and should be directed towards enhancing regional surge capacity in areas that have high incidence of urban wildland fires.

In addition to California's significant risks from wildland fires, the risk of a catastrophic earthquake occurring in California is not a matter of if, but when it will occur. California is appreciative of the significant efforts undertaken by our federal partners in the catastrophic planning for our nation's greatest risks, which includes the potential for catastrophic earthquakes within California in the Bay Area and in Southern California. Unfortunately, catastrophic planning efforts are not federally funded as block grants, which limit a state's planning abilities based upon its significant risks. As stated previously, California's risks are extensive, which includes the daunting threat and cascading effects of a catastrophic flood incident within the

¹ Figure based on funding from 2001 to 2010.

California Delta, and areas such as Sacramento and Bakersfield. If catastrophic planning through FEMA was funded as a block grant to states it would provide the mechanism to enable states to set priorities based upon strategic priorities and would allow the states to adjust and modify planning objectives based upon different variables. Transitioning the federal grant programs for catastrophic planning efforts to a block grant style program would enhance efficiencies by allowing states to determine, based upon risk and vulnerability assessments, which catastrophic planning efforts are the most critical and beneficial. In California, we would utilize such an opportunity to develop a catastrophic flood plan for communities such as Sacramento and Bakersfield to more closely examine the ramifications and cascading effects that would occur if in the event of a Delta flooding incident.

Recovery Mission Area

Non-government partners 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 developed formal relationship with businesses in the retail, banking, and telecommunications industries. These formal relationships, usually through memorandums of understanding, have led to coordination and communication efforts that will benefit all parties during an emergency. Businesses in California have repeatedly offered assistance within their communities during disasters, but unfortunately, as a result of their goodwill efforts, they are vulnerable to legal liability and lawsuits. Therefore, we statutorily created a business registry program in California that substantially protects those businesses that register on-line to limit their tort liability. In addition, California recently adopted regulations that allow us to provide funding to non-profit organizations, which provide essential services during a disaster at the request of local governments.

California has taken significant steps to form relationships with the private sector to allow for greater participation by the private sector in emergency management efforts and to reduce the costs to government. In these difficult economic times, and with diminished and uncertain government resources, we must leverage our partnerships with non-government entities to expand our recovery capabilities. We must rely on our non-government partners, now more than ever, and we must actively and fully engage them to ensure that we can help to close

the gaps in our emergency preparedness, response, and recovery efforts. Bridging the gap between the public and private sectors before, during, and after an emergency will lead to increased efficiencies and a more streamlined approach to provide the necessary and critical resources that will be needed in an emergency situation.

We all know that the work we do is faced with uncertainties, however FEMA's assistance should not be one of the unknowns during an unpredictable event. We must work together and ensure that the resources made available are put to the best use possible.

California continues to be recognized as a national leader in homeland security and emergency management efforts, 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 initiatives.