

Written Statement for the Record

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**On behalf of the U.S. Council of the
International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM)**

**For the hearing:
“Disaster Preparedness: DRRRA Implementation and
FEMA Readiness”**

**Before the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure’s
Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management
U.S. House of Representatives**

**May 22, 2019
Washington, D.C.**

Thank you, Chairwoman Titus, Ranking Member Meadows, and distinguished members of the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure's Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management for this opportunity to testify on the Disaster Recovery Reform Act of 2018 (DRRA; P.L. 115-124) and the state of disaster readiness in local governments across the country.

My name is Nick Crossley, and I am the Director of the Hamilton County, Ohio, Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency. I have been a Certified Emergency Manager for 19 years, and I appear before you today as the Immediate Past President of the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM).

About IAEM and the Local Role in Emergency Management

IAEM, comprised of more than 6,000 emergency management professionals worldwide, is a non-profit educational organization dedicated to promoting the "Principles of Emergency Management" and representing THE profession dedicated to protecting America's local communities from all hazards and threats, natural and man-made.

Local governments serve as our nation's first line of defense when disasters strike. Immediately following a disaster, local responders, including emergency managers, are first on the scene and play a key role in coordinating local response and recovery efforts, working to mitigate further damage from disasters. In the aftermath of disasters, we coordinate and help fund clean-up, recovery, and rebuilding so our residents can return to their lives as quickly as possible. All disasters begin and end locally.

We deeply appreciate the continuing support this Subcommittee has provided to the emergency management community. Thank you for the time devoted to the topics of preparedness, readiness, and ensuring our national resilience.

Disaster Preparedness, Readiness and Resilience

The most consequential work of local emergency managers actually happens BEFORE disaster strikes. Emergency managers strive every day to create well-oiled coordination and communication systems that save lives and property during and immediately following disasters. Emergency managers wake up every day thinking about and planning for the next disaster because hurricanes, public health emergencies, earthquakes, active shooters, floods, tornadoes, and technological hazards are going to happen, and usually with little-to-no notice. During times when we aren't responding to an emergency, emergency managers are hard at work behind the scenes, every day and in all levels of government and in all sectors of the nation, to help our communities become better prepared.

The 2019 Atlantic hurricane season starts in 10 days. In addition, our communities are constantly bombarded by numerous disasters, from floods and wildfires, to tornados and earthquakes. At every level, individuals, communities, and businesses must be able to plan for disasters, as well as build and sustain the capability to respond. We must understand that our local efforts will be

more impactful, our communities more resilient, with the support and partnership of our state, federal and private sector partners.

FEMA's Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) has been the backbone of the nation's all-hazards emergency management system and is the only source of direct federal funding to state and local governments for emergency management capacity building. EMPG is used for personnel, planning, training, public education, and exercises at both the state and local levels. Thanks in large part to capacity built through EMPG, local governments have been able to support the development, evaluation, implementation, and administration of local Emergency Operations Plans, meeting the unique disaster threats of our particular communities. EMPG also helps build capacity to support other jurisdictions through the provision of mutual aid, assisting each other when disasters exceed individual capacities. Additionally, EMPG facilitates critical state and local coordination and interstate collaboration and lessens the impact of disasters and helps our communities recover faster when impacted.

Training and exercises, supported at all levels of government, is also critical to preparing our professionals and communities. FEMA's Emergency Management Institute (EMI) in Emmitsburg, Maryland, has greatly increased the training that is available both online and in person to emergency managers, responders and professionals. These courses have led to a stronger, more robust emergency management community.

Disaster Recovery Reform Act of 2018 (DRRA)

Our Country's resilience, the ability to survive and recover quickly from storms and disasters without the significant loss of life or property, involves preparedness for and mitigation against the greatest risks and hazards. The new and expanded authorities in DRRA have been critical to supporting state and local efforts to promote resilience and disaster readiness.

Today, local emergency managers are the immediate and integral partners in responding to and recovering from disasters and mitigating against future risk. Emergency managers at every level are grateful to Congress for the transformational tools and authorities contained in DRRA, which the President signed into law on Oct. 5, 2018. This law illustrates Congress' commitment to resilience and changing the conversation to reduce disaster costs and losses across the country. The provisions within this law support those in state, local and tribal governments, as well as FEMA, to build more resilient communities, lessen the impacts of disasters, and ultimately help individuals and communities recover quickly.

This law focuses on pre- and post-disaster mitigation to reduce the cost of disasters. Key provisions in this law enable greater investment in pre-disaster mitigation; support efforts to reduce risks from future disasters after fires; increase state and local capacity to manage disaster recovery; and provide greater support and flexibility to survivors with disabilities. Specifically, some of the most significant provisions incentivizing resilience and building capacity include:

- **Build State and Local Capacity and Ease the Administrative Burden.** DRRRA authorizes reimbursements to state and local governments for the management and administrative costs incurred to manage federal disaster funds. This allows states and locals to build capacity to manage disaster recovery and mitigation projects. Additional provisions clarify and simplify FEMA’s programs in an attempt to make them more transparent and less burdensome for communities trying to respond to and recovery from disasters.
- **Facilitate and Incentivize Resilience.** One of the most significant provisions of DRRRA is the creation of the National Public Infrastructure Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program, which provides a significant, reliable, and consistent source of funding for states to invest in pre-disaster mitigation projects helping states take actions to prevent the threat of disasters. DRRRA dedicates an additional six percent of annual disaster costs for risk reducing, cost effective projects. This likely will be one of the key investments to help draw down disaster costs and losses over time. Research has shown that mitigation saves \$6 for every \$1 of investment. There are also provisions that help facilitate the use of FEMA funds post-disaster to invest in mitigation and “build back better,” in order to avoid future disaster damage.
- **Mitigation for Wildfire Prevention.** DRRRA makes permanent the authorization which allows states that receive Fire Management Assistance Grants to receive post-fire hazard mitigation assistance to help communities recover and prevent deadly floods and mudslides after wildland fires. DRRRA also clarifies the eligibility for certain wildfire mitigation measures under FEMA grant programs.
- **Adoption and Enforcement of Building Codes.** DRRRA incentivizes states to adopt the latest model building codes. Public Assistance funds are available post disaster to replace and restore damaged facilities to the latest codes and standards. DRRRA also allows states and local governments to use mitigation grants to facilitate the adoption and enforcement of building codes. According to a December 2018 report from the National Institute of Building Science, the benefit-cost ratios for adopting model building codes saves \$11 for every \$1 spent.

But much like the recovery from the 2017 storms, there is much work left to be done on the implementation of DRRRA. FEMA will need considerable oversight and monitoring to ensure they meet their requirements, commitments, and the intent of Congress. As FEMA moves forward toward continuing to implement these provisions, it will be critical that they continue to engage and work with the entire community engaged in building resilience throughout the country, including other federal partners, state, local, and tribal governments, and the private sector.

Conclusion

In closing, I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to discuss the community’s reaction to the

enactment and initial implementation of DRRRA, as well as the country's readiness posture for the current disaster environment. Local emergency managers have and will continue to benefit from Congress' investments in mitigation and resilience. The capabilities created and the capacity built will ensure that not only are our communities ready to respond to the next disaster but withstand and recovery quickly from the next disaster. While Congress has done much to incentivize resilience, much work remains to be done in order to make our communities safer and more resilient in 2019 and beyond.

Thank you, Chairman Titus, Ranking Member Meadows, and all members of this Subcommittee. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.