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BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION

April 12, 2018

U.S. SENATE

Good Morning Senator Wicker, Ranking Member Nelson and distinguished members of the Committee. Thank you for the privilege of testifying before you today on behalf of the American Red Cross. We applaud the Committee for holding this much-needed hearing “Are We Ready for the Next Hurricane Season? Status of Response Capabilities for 2018.” My name is Jennifer Pipa and I am Regional Chief Executive Officer of Central Florida for the Red Cross. Our Central Florida Region includes communities such as Orlando, Daytona Beach, Sarasota and Winter Haven, among others. In my role, I am based in Tampa and guide a team of staff and volunteers that serve 19 counties across five chapters who work to fulfill the Red Cross mission, including responding to a variety of natural disasters. I am pleased to share the American Red Cross perspective on the extraordinary hurricane season of 2017 and the status of preparedness for 2018.

The Mission of the Red Cross and Our Role in Disaster Response

As you may know, the mission of the Red Cross is to prevent and alleviate human suffering in the face of emergencies by mobilizing the power of volunteers and the generosity of donors. As a leader in preparedness, health and safety training, the American Red Cross works every day across America to help individuals, families, businesses and schools be better prepared for life’s challenges. Our purpose is to help people prevent, prepare for, and respond to disasters and other emergencies. We shelter, feed, and counsel victims of disasters at home and abroad;

collect and distribute nearly half of the nation's blood supply; teach lifesaving skills; and support military members and families. Whether the need is large or small, the Red Cross will be there.

Each year the Red Cross responds to nearly 64,000 natural disasters, including everything from single-home fires to large-scale emergencies such as hurricanes. As you are aware, under a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) signed in 2010, the American Red Cross is the co-lead for mass care response, known as Emergency Support Function #6 (ESF-6) with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) during large emergencies in this country.

This agreement means that the Red Cross and FEMA work together to help government agencies and community organizations plan, coordinate and provide a breadth of mass care services for people affected by disasters. Mass care services include opening shelters, feeding those affected, distributing emergency supplies and reuniting families. ESF-6 is part of the National Response Framework, a federal guide as to how the country will respond to situations ranging from local emergencies to large-scale terrorist attacks and catastrophic natural disasters. The partnership between the Red Cross and FEMA has proven to be extremely effective in helping Americans get through the initial devastation of a hurricane and on the road back to self-sufficiency. The dedication and hard work of the men and women of FEMA is very much appreciated by the Red Cross. Throughout the 2017 hurricane season and now, the Red Cross and FEMA are in constant communication and coordination on issues such as damage assessments and addressing shelter needs. In addition, any time the Red Cross responds to a disaster, we also work closely with multiple partners in the humanitarian community to ensure victims of natural disasters get the services and resources they need to get back on their feet. Those services encompass a wide variety of needs such as providing assistance with mental health care, financial assistance to cover short term needs and shelter for pets and service animals.

2017: A Look Back at a Precedent-Setting Hurricane Season

Every disaster is unique. It has its own set of challenges and circumstances and the 2017 hurricane season was no exception. Hurricane Harvey was the first major hurricane to make landfall in the U.S. in 12 years and it made landfall 3 separate times over 5 days after it stalled on the Texas coast. The resulting inundation challenged all first responders as parts of inland Texas were completely cut-off, including the interstate highway system in and around Houston. With its erratic, unpredictable track, Hurricane Irma left almost the entire southern half of Florida under watches and warnings that shifted from the East coast to the West coast and challenged planners across the state. And then there was Hurricane Maria, which compromised the logistics and infrastructure network of an entire island. All points of entry into Puerto Rico were devastated and the island was cut-off from the mainland. The time and distance required to reopen the ports and reestablish a supply chain created a unique situation for all responding agencies and organizations. Despite these challenges, the American Red Cross was there, working alongside FEMA and our partners to deliver the mission with compassion and quality to more of those in need.

The Red Cross response to the hurricanes that made landfall in the United States and its Territories was just as record setting as were the Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, Maria and Nate. As of today, our numbers show that across these hurricanes the Red Cross:

- supported 782,592 shelter stays;

- provided 11,619,021 meals;
- delivered 7,401,854 relief items;
- served 588,622 families through casework and recovery planning.

We were able provide this momentous level of support by the dedication and compassion of the more than 18,800 volunteers who selflessly gave of their time to serve others. The level of service to those impacted by each of these storms exemplified the Red Cross mission.

And the work to address the needs of those affected by these storms continues; the Red Cross is committed to helping those impacted by last year's hurricanes get back on their feet. We continue to have long-term recovery operations in each of the affected areas to ensure that we address needs such as clean water, community health, livelihoods restoration and access to power. In areas still experiencing difficulty in getting back to at least pre-storm conditions, we will continue to work with impacted individuals to create recovery plans, navigate paperwork and determine eligibility for financial assistance. We have provided reports to Congress as updated information becomes available and we will continue to do so.

2018: Preparedness for the Upcoming Season

While the Red Cross has been able to meet needs that have arisen due to last year's storms, as we prepare for the 2018 season, it is important for us to identify areas of concern from last year's response in order to develop a successful strategy for preparing for upcoming disasters. Some top needs from 2017 which inform our 2018 planning include:

- Effectively communicating information about pre-landfall evacuation centers;
- Managing expectations about what people need to bring with them to evacuation centers and making sure people understand the difference between an evacuation center and a shelter, and;
- Recruiting volunteers

To address these needs, we meet with and maintain ongoing relationships with local and county emergency managers in order to collaborate on public service announcements and education. We work with local and county officials to identify resources currently on hand, as well as any gaps that may exist between local and county government resources and Red Cross resources and how to address those gaps. The Red Cross also continuously develops and updates communications materials that can be used in a variety of social and traditional media and translated into other languages relevant to the local population, that provide information about evacuation procedures and shelters.

An example of an ongoing Red Cross preparedness education campaign that helps families know what to bring to evacuation centers is our Pillowcase Project, which is our signature youth preparedness program and is implemented in every Red Cross region. The Pillowcase Project is for children in grades 3-5 and teaches them about personal and family preparedness for local hazards and home fires. Students receive a pillowcase to decorate and use as a personal emergency supplies kit. Students are encouraged to fill the pillowcase with items they would like to have if they need to be evacuated.

An example of a Red Cross initiative to strengthen volunteer recruitment is our Regional Diversity Boards, which are designed to, among other things, ensure that the Regional

workforce (staff and volunteers) mirrors the community it serves and increases the number of volunteers and representation by key demographics.

Elements for Effectiveness: Readiness, Adaptability and Support from the American People

In 2017 we kicked-off a multi-year nationwide initiative to strengthen our Readiness. The Readiness Initiative was designed to address recurring challenges by supporting regional teams in building capacity to deliver our mission; better recruiting, engaging and retaining our volunteers; being more efficient and effective in all of our activities; and harnessing the power of technology and teamwork to meet our mission in regions every day and for major disasters nationwide. We defined readiness as “the capacity and capability needed to reliably accomplish our mission, which we do with our partners.” Our vision is to get ready, be ready, and stay ready to reliably serve clients and communities impacted by the highest probability disasters in communities around the country.

In addition, there is one overarching principle to responding to disasters which is at the heart of every response strategy. At the Red Cross and throughout the disaster response community, we know that our capacity to react to natural disasters as we go forward is directly connected to our ability to adapt and evolve. And technology is a critical part of that evolution. A major aspect of the Red Cross’s technological innovation in the last couple of years is the development of “RC View” – a state of the art geographic information system (GIS) and data visualization tool that provides the Red Cross and its partners with a common disaster response capability. This technology aids the Red Cross as we assess damage, formulate emergency response and evacuation plans and identify and understand relationships between areas affected by disasters and areas of social vulnerability. Because of RC View, the Red Cross is able to speed up our response time, make better resource decisions and improve our delivery of services to those most in need. With increasingly accessible data, we are better able to understand hazards and take necessary actions to mitigate, respond to, and recover from disasters when they strike.

While data and technology are essential to responding to disasters, the plain truth is that a successful disaster response operation can’t happen without money and volunteers. The Red Cross does not receive federal funding for disaster response operations, but relies on the generosity of the American people to do so. Furthermore, our volunteers are the backbone of our humanitarian efforts; nearly 90 percent of the Red Cross workforce is volunteer. Americans who give of their time and donations are why we have been able to respond to disasters for over a hundred years. 2017 was truly an extraordinary year for natural disasters. But because of the kindness of the American people, including many of your constituents, in a 45-day period late last year, the Red Cross was able to respond to back-to-back hurricanes – Harvey, Irma, Maria and Nate – in addition to the devastating wildfires in California and the deadliest mass shooting in recent U.S. history in Las Vegas. We at the Red Cross are extremely grateful to the American people for all they do to enable us to help those in need.

Conclusion

Again, thank you to this Committee for this important examination of how well America is prepared for life-threatening storms and thank you for allowing the Red Cross to share our perspective on the hurricane season that just passed and the one coming soon. Hurricane season for the Atlantic Basin runs from June 1 to November 30 and a busier than average hurricane season is forecast, so many Americans will be facing these threats again in the very near future. At the Red Cross, we will continue to fulfill our mission of alleviating suffering and meet our obligations to provide leadership with our federal and humanitarian partners to address whatever natural disasters occur. We look forward to partnering with the United States Congress, other branches of government, the faith-based community, non-profits and for-profits in preparing for disasters and recovering from them. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.