



**US Department of Homeland Security (DHS)  
Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL)  
Listening Session Recap, Miami  
April 25, 2018**

## **I. Introduction**

This session was held at the West Dade Regional Library located in Miami, FL. In attendance were representatives of non-governmental organizations, service providers, community members, and government partners.

Introductory speakers included:

- Cameron Quinn, DHS Officer for CRCL
- Linda Mastandrea, Director, FEMA Office of Disability Integration and Coordination (ODIC)
- James Montgomery, Unit Chief, FEMA Civil Rights Program, FEMA Office of Equal Rights
- Regis Phelan, Acting Director, FEMA Office of Equal Rights
- Miami Deputy Mayor Maurice Kemp
- Anna Hinken, DHS CRCL, Moderator

The listening session began with Deputy Mayor Kemp welcoming attendees. Ms. Hinken introduced Officer Quinn who explained the purpose of the meeting. Officer Quinn explained that the purpose of the meeting was to hear about concerns and experiences related to the impact of the disaster had on individuals with disabilities and the surrounding areas. She asked that participants also share “what worked,” or effective practices. By better understanding these experiences, and in partnership with the state and local entities, including non-profit organizations, she noted that we can do more to improve preparedness, response, and recovery for persons with disabilities in time for the next hurricane season and other disasters.

Prior to opening up the session for participants to make comments, Officer Quinn introduced Ms. Linda Mastandrea, Mr. Regis Phelan, and Mr. Montgomery. Ms. Mastandrea and Mr. Phelan each provided a brief overview of the activities of their respective offices with regard to individuals with disabilities and disaster-related activities.

## II. Issues/concerns and Effective Practices Noted

### A. Communication Access for People with Disabilities

- **Government<sup>1</sup> Agencies Should Improve Communication with Communities about “Special Needs” Shelters** -- One organization suggested better communication and outreach is needed to promote “special needs” shelters. According to the organization, there is a need to promote the shelters especially to the elderly so they can be educated on where they can find shelter that will accommodate them and that it is important to sign up ahead of time.
- **Governments Should Improve Communication about the Need to Register People Who May Need Assistance in a Disaster** -- One local official noted that the federal government should be a force multiplier in messaging to the public to register especially in Florida since the state requires every county to have a registry. The registry is not just for those individuals with disabilities but also for individuals who might need assistance in moving to the most appropriate evacuation center.
- **Governments Should Improve Communication to Communities about Available Services** -- One representative noted that there is a core contingent of individuals who are not aware of what they should do so maybe we all need to go back and hone our “communication strategy” whether it be media, print, broadcast, or social media on how to get the word out on a year-long basis.
- **Governments Should Improve Communication to the Elderly** - One of the representatives from an organization that focuses on the aging told us that the elderly population do not all have the means to pay for a smartphone or the internet. However, the elderly who are low income or may be homeless qualify for the type of phone that only can be used for texting. The representative continued that this is what is needed, more

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<sup>1</sup> The Government” or “Governments” as used in this document refers to federal, state, or local governments, depending upon which of these entities has a role or responsibilities in the area described.

education for the elderly so they can use technology like a tablet or a computer, how to text and how to use Facebook.

## **B. Preparedness and Evacuation**

- **Governments Need to Plan for Meeting the Transportation Needs of Persons with Disabilities** - A representative from an organization told us that her organization estimated that 30-35 percent of people were calling for transportation to shelters at the last minute and that was a problem.
- **Governments Should Use an Array of Existing Methods to Identify People who May Need Assistance during a Disaster** - A representative from an organization told us that although there had been issues with shelters and transportation, a bigger issue is getting people registered for services. She went on to say that the issue was when people registered later or had never registered for “special needs” shelters and for transportation to get them to the shelters. The representative suggested a concerted community effort to get people registered especially among the elderly and individuals with disabilities was needed.
  - One of the Key West organizations mentioned that they work closely with Monroe County Social Services to ask people to sign up for the registry. They put out newsletters and always encourage people to sign up and to be prepared.
  - Another organization representative told us that registries are important because they allow for the calculation of how many resources will be needed for a disaster. It allows an organization to do a better job in ensuring that resources are available. The organization representative mentioned the Miami-Dade registry and asked for assistance in ensuring that everyone was registered since the county and organizations do a thousand outreach events every year to ask that people sign up for the registry but only about 4,000 out of a population of 2.7 million are signed up.
- **Governments Should Enhance Preparedness Planning by Improving Intergovernmental and Community Collaboration** - One of the Miami-Dade officials pointed out that communication among local

groups is important and it all plays an important part in the response effort. The official pointed out that at a meeting such as this one, it is evident that there are many groups locally that should have a role in response efforts but they don't all know each other, and it is important that as many as possible be invited to the same meetings. When everyone is included, then you are able to get a look at the big picture so there is no duplication and organizations can pool resources if necessary to educate people on preparedness, among other things.

- **Governments Should Improve Communication about Evacuations -** One representative told us that the county did a great job in getting the word out about where to evacuate but it could have been better. There is an ongoing effort to come up with a new plan so everyone can be better positioned for next time.
- **Effective Practice: Innovation to Address Capacity Issues at Shelters -** A local official told us that they are working on an app that will be coming out soon to help with the capacity issues at evacuation centers. The app will allow individuals to know what evacuation centers have open slots in advance. Once the app is ready, the county would be reinforcing the message that the app is available by using media, social media, and multiple outlets that the county utilizes to advise the public. People would be able to look at their smartphones and see what shelters are available and which ones are filling up. The local official went on to say that this will help people from being turned away from shelters.

## C. Sheltering

- **Shelter Providers Should Work to Improve Access for the Elderly -** A representative from a healthcare organization talked about the need for shelters for elderly individuals since they are the frailest. She said that her organization encourages all their patients to register for shelters in the event of a hurricane. Her organization can assist in taking care of patients but more shelters for the elderly are needed.
- **Shelter Providers Should Work to Improve Sheltering for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities -** A representative from a local agency that serves individuals with developmental disabilities told us that they have their case managers prepare and educate their

patients for hurricanes and tornadoes but no matter how much preparation is done, the shelters were too slow to open or there were not enough shelters. Some of her patients who had pre-registered for a special needs shelter were being turned away because the shelter was too full. According to the representative, this is a problem since this type of individual often has medical equipment and will have a nurse with them 24/7. Another issue was transportation, specifically there is very little transportation to take a persons with disabilities to a shelter. When they were able to get transportation, they were told that there was no more room at the shelter.

- **The Government Should Ensure Shelters in Monroe County have Spanish Language Interpreters and Assistive Devices** - One organization reported on the lack of Spanish interpreters in the Monroe County shelters as well as a lack of assistive devices. Other organizations said they did assist the Red Cross in Monroe by providing assistive devices and Spanish interpreters.
- **Governments Need to Improve Language Access** - The United Way representative talked about an incident that occurred outside a building with a number of elderly individuals who were going to sleep in the parking lot. The staff who was there to evacuate them did not speak Spanish and the incident garnered a lot of negative press as a result of the inability to communicate effectively. The United Way representative was turned away when he wanted to help. The representative said “this was a missed opportunity for FEMA and local helpers to make a connection.”
- **Governments Should Consider the Sheltering Needs of Individuals with Behavioral Problems** - An organization representative told us that there are no shelters for individuals with behavioral problems and they don’t qualify for “special needs” shelters but can’t go to regular shelters either. These individuals have to stay in the home of residence and hope for the best.
- **Shelter Providers Should Work to Improve Accommodations for Individuals with Addiction** - Another challenge raised by a local official was the sheltering of individuals with addiction issues. Addictions are not resolved because there is a hurricane and federal and state partners have to help localities figure out how to shelter these individuals. Both

resources and expertise have to be found.

- **Governments Need to Provide Training for Shelter Staff** - A local work group is looking into various challenges, for example, how to train shelter staff specifically to work with individuals with autism in stressful settings. A number of organizations in the Miami-Dade area, to include emergency managers, are looking into some of the challenges associated with sheltering people with disabilities, the elderly, and those who are in hospice care.
- **Governments Should Consider Recommendations Related to Sheltering in Place** -- An organization asked if there had been consideration given to developing partnerships between government and private entities for sheltering in place. The organization that asked the question was a private entity that cared for patients who had to be moved to shelters in the event of a disaster. A representative from another organization added that sheltering is a challenge since the state of Florida has a law that requires every shelter to have in place staff familiar with the type of patient it will house, for example a shelter that will house Alzheimer's patients should have staff familiar with Alzheimer's.

#### **D. Access to FEMA Resources and Programs**

- **Effective Practice: Local Teams and FEMA Worked Well in Miami-Dade** - A county official mentioned that one of the things that worked well was the deployment of their staff t with FEMA to different targeted areas of Miami-Dade to mitigate any language issues when communicating on the availability of services for citizens that need FEMA resources.
- **Effective Practice: Deployment of Mobile Teams Worked Well in Miami-Dade** - According to a Miami-Dade official, one of the things that worked well was the rolling teams that were deployed throughout different neighborhoods. These mobile units contained FEMA team members and the units would pop up in different locations; this was very effective. This type of effort needs to be replicated
- **FEMA Needs to Ensure Limited English Proficient (LEP) Persons and other Vulnerable Populations Have Access to FEMA Resources**

Several representatives and community members reported that they heard of issues with accessing FEMA resources after the storm. One issue was the lack of Spanish language speakers on the FEMA side; another representative reported that he had heard that at Miami-Dade College there were long lines of people waiting to see the FEMA teams. According to the report, lines were eight hours long and that made it hard for the elderly to stand and wait. Someone mentioned that they heard that the FEMA teams in Coconut Grove were excellent.

- **FEMA Needs to Ensure Access to its Application** - One of the organizations commented that the community was not all prepared to submit applications online. In the past, there had been more disaster relief centers open and the expectation was that this would remain the same. The community was offered much less and transitioning online was something for which that the community should have been better prepared. Another organization commented that the preference was for brick and mortar physical disaster centers not everything online. There were more county and state resources available and according to a local official, it might be worthwhile to automate those resources and combine them with FEMA assistance resources. It helps to have assistance resources strategically placed throughout the county to help facilitate access, for example some would be placed near public transportation and major highways and in Miami-Dade colleges.

## **E. Services and Supports for Recovery**

- **Governments Need to Ensure Funding is Available for Debris Removal During Recovery/Effective Practice** - One representative told us it was a necessity to get funding for recovery efforts and after this hurricane, several agencies and non-profits banded together to provide funds. Local agencies established an emergency fund that could be used to respond to needs that emerged. Surprisingly after food, water and clothing, the emergent need was funding for debris removal. That was the single most requested type of funding request especially among the elderly. This effort worked well.

## **III. Conclusion**

CRCL and FEMA thanked participants for sharing concerns and best practices and encouraged people to reach out after this meeting if they

have additional concerns or questions that were not brought up during the session.