



**US Department of Homeland Security (DHS)  
Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL)  
Listening Session Recap, Riverside, CA  
April 10, 2018**

## **I. Introduction**

The Riverside County Office on Aging hosted this listening session, which was held in Riverside, CA. 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
- Renee Dar-Khan, Supervising Program Specialist, Riverside County Office on Aging
- Paul Van Doren, Executive Director Community Access Center
- Anna Hinken, DHS CRCL, Moderator

The listening session began with Ms. Anna Hinken from DHS CRCL welcoming attendees and reviewing housekeeping rules for the session. Both Ms. Dar-Khan and Mr. Van Doren thanked everyone for attending and explained what their organizations do related to disability issues.

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 the session up for participants to make comments, Officer Quinn introduced Ms. Linda Mastandrea, director of FEMA’s Office of Disability Integration and Coordination (ODIC) and Mr. James

Montgomery, the Civil Rights Program Manager for FEMA's Office of Equal Rights. Ms. Mastandrea and Mr. Montgomery provided a brief overview of the activities of their respective offices.

## II. Issues/concerns and Effective Practices Noted

### A. Communication Access for People with Disabilities

- **The Government<sup>1</sup> Should Include Organizations that Serve the Elderly and People with Disabilities in Planning** -The Riverside County Office on Aging representative talked about how her office and other offices and organizations who represent the aging and people with disabilities are the last to be brought on board when there is a discussion on planning and preparation and thus it hinders their ability to provide feedback on how to tailor the message that goes out to seniors and people with multiple disabilities.
- **The Government Should Improve Communication with the Deaf Population** - The Community Access Center Director told us that Riverside County has a large deaf population and a population of people with multiple disabilities. One of the issues that the Center has worked on for a couple of years is how people get notified: one example being that media outlets will include information that scrolls on the bottom of a screen for deaf people but blind people can't see it.
- **The Government Should Improve its Emergency Notification Process** - A Riverside emergency manager talked about the Riverside emergency notification system that currently exists. Only one percent of the numbers that are in the system are land lines and the rest are cell phones. There is work being done on the system that will be able to alert all cell phones within a certain geographic location.

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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.

## **B. Preparedness and Evacuation**

- **The Government and Service Providers Should Use an Array of Existing Methods to Identify People who May Need Assistance during Evacuations** – The Community Access Center representative told us that registries don't necessarily work. People are independent and they are not home all the time. According to him the best thing is for people with disabilities to meet with their local fire department and let them know their issues since every disability is individual and each individual has to plan for that disability. Another organization representative stated that there is a population that is adverse to the internet and you will "not get them on it, no matter what." It's hard to reach those folks. The Riverside County Office on Aging representative said there is some cataloging of individuals that does happen and their office does keep a registry of frail seniors on hand but it is hard to maintain and they try and feed into the registry that Social Services maintains. The Riverside city official said there is no registry in Riverside but they have information that they can look into based on people who register for medical devices that need power and people who get dial-a ride service.
  - Mr. Montgomery from FEMA asked if there was a benefit to coordinating registry information between FEMA and local agencies in a disaster. The Community Access Center representative said that sharing of information is always valuable and they would like to hear the feedback we get from Ventura at their listening session tomorrow.
  
- **The Government Should Work Collaboratively with Local Counties and Non-Profit Organizations to Improve Preparedness Planning -** The Executive Director of the Community Access Center told us that more work needs to be done to prepare for an evacuation. The Independent Living Centers have a network throughout all counties in California and they are always trying to share resources, for example for the fires, transportation was a big issue since there were bottlenecks to transport people with power wheelchairs. The Center for Independent Living Director recommended using the ride-on buses from the county for evacuations since all those vehicles are wheelchair accessible. However, there have been challenges to making this work.

- **The Government Should Ensure Disaster Preparedness is Taught in Schools** - A community member said that FEMA should integrate preparedness information in school curriculums. The regional FEMA representative agreed but said his office in Oakland covers several states and territories so their efforts have to be supplemented by local community efforts. One of the representatives from an organization brought up that he was in a cohort that was looking at building preparedness into school curriculums in four of the biggest states, (CA, TX, FL and NY) but a problem is that school districts have a lot of bureaucracy to get through before you can get something included in a curriculum.
- **The Government Should Plan Ahead to Ensure Funding for Back-up Generators Is Available** - A local representative talked about the need for funding for back-up generators for facilities that provide housing for people with disabilities during disasters. Among other things, individuals with disabilities need to be able to charge their wheelchairs. There needs to be funding available at some level for this type of assistance. Someone else asked if there is a baseline of electrical support that that institutions that care for people with disabilities must have. According to the FEMA representative, this should be part of overall preparedness planning and also be more of local issue. The Riverside County Office of Emergency Management mentioned that that any type of funding or grants would have to go through the State. The Riverside Office of Aging representative mentioned that this type of issue should be worked out in advance of a crisis.
- **The Government Should Plan Ahead to Ensure Funding to Pay In-Home Support Providers** - The Executive Director of the Community Access Center told us about paid providers who took care of people with disabilities in Ventura and in the San Fernando Valley during recent disasters but were not getting paid the whole time even **although** a disaster had been declared. This is a problem because these providers are not high income people.

### **C. Sheltering**

- **Shelter Providers Should Strengthen Accommodations for People with Disabilities** - The American Red Cross representative pointed out that there are two types of facilities: those that are regulated facilities

that are part of an evacuation plan and facilities that are not regulated. There are concerns when facilities are unregulated. For example, during a recent disaster, fifteen people with functional needs had to be segregated when they ended up at an unlicensed facility and this was a problem.

- **The Government Should Support the Expansion of the Functional Assessment Service Team (FAST)** - An organization representative spoke about the FAST program in California that was active in 2014 and had forty plus county workers and other people with disabilities specifically trained to work with people with disabilities in shelters. However, the FAST teams are difficult to keep functioning in areas that don't have disasters. It's a great program but there is lack of interest when there have not been disasters. It's a state program and it requires a three day training course. The Red Cross would accept FAST team members to assist with shelters. FAST is not currently being funded. FEMA headquarters commented that FAST is not unique to California. FEMA disability integration specialist will go to shelters to identify specific needs that people have. Another participant commented that that these type of specialists need to be at shelters helping identify needs. Linda Mastandrea from FEMA talked about the reservist program and that it may be an option to meet this need.

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

- **FEMA Should Improve Communication Related to its Role in the Communities it Serves** - A community member asked about the role of FEMA is when there is not a current need for FEMA support. (Pre-disaster) Ms. Mastandrea from FEMA responded that the Administer is focused on building regional, state, and local capacity and at having more Disability Integration Specialists in each region. One of the organization representatives pointed out that this means that FEMA has to work on messaging because after a disaster the first question from the local community is "Where is FEMA?"
- **FEMA and the Red Cross Should Continue to Work Together to Address the Needs of the Community** - The Red Cross representative told us that the Red Cross is always trying to maintain partnerships but every disaster is different. The Red Cross representative mentioned a FEMA meeting on sheltering that he attended where anytime a new idea

was proposed, the FEMA participant pointed to the Red Cross and told the audience members the Red Cross should implement it.

- **FEMA Should Have More Large Print Materials - The Community Access Center representative** commented that FEMA resources are harder and harder to get. For example, he talked about how great FEMA materials in large print are but he only has a few left. He was able to get the county to pay for printing additional materials. The representative went on to mention that he uses the FEMA materials to teach people especially people with disabilities, about personal preparedness.
- **FEMA Needs to Ensure Preparedness Materials Are Accessible to People with Disabilities** - An organization representative told us that current materials provided by FEMA for those with disabilities and access functional needs are not accessible for the blind, deaf, or English as a second language speakers. Videos produced by FEMA still have to be modified and there are typos on some videos. ASL translations or local specific information need to be added to FEMA videos. For example, earthquake information needs to be added to the FEMA videos since other states don't necessarily have this type of disaster so the FEMA messaging has to be supplemented.

### **III. Conclusion**

CRCL and FEMA thanked participants for sharing concerns and best practices and encouraged participants to reach out after the meeting if they have additional concerns or questions that were not brought up during the session. Officer Quinn mentioned the upcoming listening sessions in other locations and stressed the value of these listening sessions in helping to capture the important things that we need to consider moving forward.