



**US Department of Homeland Security (DHS)
Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL)
Listening Session Recap, Ventura, CA
April 11, 2018**

I. Introduction

The Independent Living Resource Center hosted this listening session, which was held at their facility in Ventura, CA. In attendance were representatives of non-governmental organizations, service providers, community members, and government partners representing the DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and Santa Barbara County Emergency Management Services. 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
- Dani Anderson, Executive Director, Ventura Independent Living Resource 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. Ms. Hinken then introduced Dani Anderson, the Executive Director of Independent Living Resource Center, serving Ventura, Santa Barbara, and San Luis Obispo Counties. Ms. Anderson thanked attendees for their participation and encouraged all present to be open and engage in this important conversation with federal staff, which she noted was a valuable opportunity.

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, 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 Government¹ Should Establish a 911 Call Center With Video Phone Access** - A community member stated that there were no TTYs in call centers so there is no way to know if a deaf person using TTY was attempting to get in touch. It was also later noted by others that most in the deaf community know to use video relay services and TTY is dated technology, and that video phones should be added.
- **The Government Should Have a Way to Communicate with Transient Populations** - An American Red Cross representative inquired as to the methods by which the transient populations were notified of the emergency. A Santa Barbara city official reported that they worked with their law enforcement to assist with evacuations of transient populations. Warming centers were opened for use by these populations as shelters. If individuals with mental health problems were encountered, police contacted the appropriate local agency for assistance.
- **Media Outlets and the Government Should Be More Aware of Requirements for Providing Access to Deaf Populations** – A community member reported that local media outlets are very aware of

¹ ¹ 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.

the need for captioning and the provision of ASL for newscasts, however, other government entities need more education on this matter. It was noted that a representative from the Governor's office came to town to do a press conference and did not arrange ahead of time for an ASL interpreter to be present. Emergency captioning was reported to be very difficult for small stations to obtain so their captioning is not live during emergencies. Additionally, concern was expressed about ensuring the visibility of the ASL interpreter during televised press conferences and emergency related news items.

- **The Government Should Improve Emergency Notification Processes for Communities** - There were "sandwich boards" used throughout the community that contained emergency related information. Various organizations conducted outreach to be able to communicate with a variety of groups. A speaker stressed the importance of having a pre-existing network so that there are channels in place by which to share important information. Additionally, a Ventura County VOAD stated that various NGOs went door to door with the Sheriff's Department talking to people and getting them ready to evacuate, giving them information on shelters, available resources, food, water, etc.
- **Effective Practices: Partnerships in Preparedness Outreach, Red Cross Messaging for Limited English Proficient (LEP) Populations**
The Independent Living Resource Center Director talked about the importance of getting messages to people where they are, in places where they shop, where they get gas and places of that nature. She commented on the effectiveness of partnering with the Red Cross. The Red Cross resource guide is bilingual. She also pointed out that the Santa Barbara area has broadcasts in Spanish, both TV and radio, and that they were about to get emergency information out to LEP populations.
- **Effective Practice: Centralized Call Center and Access to LEP Populations** - A Santa Barbara County official reported that early on the county had established a centralized call center and hotline number where all inquiries were then routed to the appropriate department or agency. This prevented individuals from calling 911 with inquiries and potentially overloading the 911 system. This center had bilingual Spanish interpreters taking calls. If additional languages were needed,

the County was able to use the 911 dispatch center's multilingual service to obtain interpretation in other languages. Information about the call center/hotline was widely distributed throughout the county, including through postings on web sites and publication via social media, and it contained in all emergency alerts that were issued. The official invited anyone who had experienced difficulty using the call center to contact him and they would work to correct the problem.

- **Communications with Limited English Proficient (LEP) Persons Should be Considered** - The Independent Living Resource Center representative told us that the organization received requests for communication access in various languages and the Center used creative means of dealing with these requests. For example, the Center would locate students who spoke Thai from local universities. The community pulled together in whatever manner they could when such needs arose.

- **Effective Practice: Positive Experience with Mass Alerts** - A Department of Rehabilitation official reported that receiving alerts on cell phones worked well for everyone. They were then able to communicate with staff who have disabilities so that everyone knew what was happening. The text alerts were very helpful and provided good information regarding where evacuations were happening, what closures were happening, and in raising overall awareness of the emergency situation.

B. Preparedness and Evacuation

- **Entities that Provide Case Management Should Be Integrated into Planning and Response** - A Ventura County volunteer organization reported that it was difficult to identify all of the individuals with disabilities and other access and functional needs who needed help. It was a challenge to get information from nursing homes and facilities that support individuals with developmental disabilities. While they were told that these individuals were being supported by their case managers, no facilities or agencies were providing specific information. It was noted that even during a drill/exercise, these same issues come up. The organization representative noted how important it was that case management organizations and others that support individuals with disabilities get involved in drills/exercises and be available and

collaborative during real life emergencies.

- **Effective Practice: Independent Living Resource Center Efforts -**
The Independent Living Resource Center reported that they reached out to consumers who are deaf, have intellectual disabilities, and/or mobility disabilities to make sure they understood what was going on, what evacuation meant, and that they had a plan in place to safely evacuate.

- **The Government Should be Able to “Pre Identify” People with Disabilities and their Needs as Part of Preparedness Planning -**
 - **Registries** - A community member asked about the existence of voluntary registries in the area and noted that if registries are not the solution, then some other method of identifying people with disabilities is needed so that there is adequate assistance available during an evacuation/disaster. Someone else noted that Santa Barbara does not have a registry but they do have a list of people receiving in-home care. They use this list to make “reverse calls” to these individuals to provide information and check on them. Someone else suggested that the county Health Department should be brought into this discussion about how to establish a registry in Ventura. Another community member noted that there was no individual registry in their city but that they have public care registration, an accounting of organizations and individuals who serve the community. She reported that they communicate evacuation information and other emergency-related information to these providers and ask that they reach out to the individuals they serve. Their agency does not have the capacity to do individual outreach.

 - **Other Sources of Data** - A Santa Barbara community member noted that an additional source of data that can be used to identify names and residences of individuals who may be in need of assistance is CMS data. This data will also provide information regarding medical needs such as if a person is on a ventilator or needs dialysis. There was talk of using zip code information to identify populations in the CMS data base. In Ventura County, and surrounding locations have large elderly populations and do use voluntary registries. All of this

information is in a database and the non-profit organization have access to it for recovery purposes.

- **Community Member Experience** - A community member who is the parent of an adult son with significant medical needs (he is power dependent to maintain health and safety) shared her concerns that she had been very frightened when the fire came near her home. She is unable to assist her son with evacuating on her own. No one came to help so she called the police for assistance. She stated that that the phone connection was down due to high winds and she felt helpless. She suggested that authorities should have some way to know where people with disabilities who cannot self-evacuate are located so that help can be sent when disaster strikes in the future.

- **Effective Practice: Department of Public Health Support for Evacuations** - A Santa Barbara Public Health Department official reported that they worked closely with their call center. They kept track of numerous health care facilities and agencies, tracking their response to the evacuation/disaster activities. Approximately twelve facilities evacuated and Health Department staff kept in touch with these facilities on a daily basis. They also work with other counties and agencies in the area, including mental health agencies, to track their activity. They do not track individuals, rather they are in touch with the facilities who know where their individuals with access and functional needs are. The Health Department also helped by: (1) dispatching assistance to where evacuations weren't happening because people did not want to evacuate, (2) helping individuals get their medications, and (3) streamlining evacuation of those needing medical care.

C. Sheltering

- **The Government Should Consider Reactivating Functional Assessment Service Teams (FAST)** - The Independent Living Resource Center talked about FAST training opportunities in California for teams to work effectively with individuals with disabilities and other access and functional needs who are in shelters. The Red Cross was made aware of these teams and other related resources that could be utilized in shelters. However, these teams were not deployed during the

recent disaster and she expressed concern about this. There are many people in the Ventura County office who can provide assistance and they weren't called upon to do so. Someone asked about whose call it is to deploy the teams. Another organization reported that there is a CA State Department of Social Service contact who oversees the deployment of FAST teams. A Santa Barbara community member noted that that in their county, the state contact would be called upon by the county Department of Social Services because they are the entity that collaborates with Red Cross and other shelter providers. Since there was no deployment of FAST teams in the recent disaster, the lesson learned here is that there needs to be improvement in effective communication between organizations involved in getting those resources deployed.

- **The Government Should Provide Training for Shelter Staff** – A speaker expressed concern about a lack of training for shelter staff.
- **Governments and Shelter Providers Should Look into Funding to Ensure Accessibility at Shelters** - The Red Cross representative brought up the topic of funding as it relates to obtaining Access and Functional Needs (AFN) shelter supplies such as accessible shower trailers and other accessibility features that are necessary for a shelter to be inclusive. She suggested that there is a need for more state and local plans to include this type of funding so that resources are closer to the impacted area and they could also be used for non-declared disasters when needed. There is no one agency with deep enough pockets to take on this funding responsibility. Collectively working on this at the state and local level year by year will improve how communities respond and recover from disasters.

D. Access to FEMA Resources and Programs

- **FEMA Should Clearly Communicate the Impact of Immigration Status on Eligibility for FEMA Assistance** - A representative from an immigration advocacy agency spoke about some impacted residents who may not have documentation fearing that they would not be able to access FEMA resources. Mr. Passey from FEMA reported that he had worked closely with the Santa Barbara County officials to make sure that information was available about access to emergency resources for immigrant communities. FEMA used social media, traditional media, and outreach to community organizations to get this information out.

Messages were pushed out in various languages. A USCIS representative present and members of local immigration-related agencies were encouraged to exchange cards so that a more direct information flow could be established about eligibility for assistance that may arise in future disasters. A participant from Red Cross reported that their services are available to all residents in need regardless of immigration status. To wrap up the discussion of immigration related issues, a staffer from Congressman Brownley's office reminded everyone that the office does constituent services. This includes providing case work to replace lost certificates and green cards. They were also able to provide expedited processing under special circumstances with the help of USCIS and helped out with SBA loans and FEMA assistance for people who were confused about the application process. One individual got a copy of their green card and was able to therefore get a loan. The Congressional staffer encouraged anyone else who needed assistance to contact the Congressman's office.

- **FEMA Should Clearly Communicate about its Role in Individual Assistance** - The Independent Living Resource Center representative asked about the process for applying for Individual Assistance. She is part of a collaborative group for the state that focuses on emergency preparedness for individuals with disabilities. When the topic of Individual Assistance came up during the calls this group had, the feedback was that this was a secondary concern because the area is affluent and people just relocated to their second homes. This is not an accurate assessment for the people with whom the Center works; therefore, it's important for agencies like the Center to know more about how Individual Assistance works.

E. Services and Supports for Recovery

- **Governments, Organizations, and the Whole Community Should Work Together on Recovery Efforts** - A Santa Barbara non-profit representative provided the group with information about the recovery activities taking place in the area. The county has supported a long term recovery working group beginning in mid-January. Work has progressed and various committees have been formed to address case management, wellness for crisis and trauma, and spiritual care related to the effects the disaster has had on residents. There are also several

rehabilitation committees as well as a volunteer committee. Things are going well and everyone is involved in the recovery of their community. However, the representative has received feedback from the agency that is doing case management for long term care services about delays in providing care for some individuals with access and functional needs.

- **Effective Practice: Local Assistance Centers and Transportation -** A Santa Barbara County official reported that they set up a local assistance center for about two months following the fires. People could come to the center and get information about eligibility for assistance and other information from FEMA and other state and local agencies. That transitioned into an information center that remained available for a longer period of time. The county provided rides so that everyone had the ability to get to the center and get the information they needed.
- **Governments, Organizations and Businesses Should Clearly Communicate about Disaster Unemployment Assistance –** A community member asked about an employee who was unable to get to work due to roads being closed as a result of the fires. How would she be able to get her lost wages reimbursed? A FEMA representative answered that there is Disaster Unemployment Assistance. Funding comes from the Disaster Relief Fund through the U.S. Dept. of Labor to CA State Employment Development Department. This can assist with reduced wages, lost wages, unemployment, self-employment, contractors that provide home care, etc. A United Way/VOAD representative reported that these organizations also had funding available for employment loss. She noted that their form was far less “consuming and horrendous” than the FEMA form. People who applied through United Way are already receiving checks, some as much as \$4,000. She praised their program and noted that if one was a caretaker in Santa Barbara, one could apply for the Santa Barbara funding.

III. Conclusion

CRCL and FEMA thanked participants for sharing concerns and encouraged people to reach out after this 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.