

**STATEMENT OF ROBERT A. ECKELS,
COUNTY JUDGE, HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS
BEFORE THE
SENATE HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
HEARING ON RECOVERING FROM HURRICANE KATRINA:
RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF THE DISPLACED, TODAY AND TOMORROW
UNITED STATES SENATE
SEPTEMBER 28, 2005**

Madam Chairman and members of the Committee, I am Robert Eckels, and I serve as the County Judge of Harris County, Texas. To clarify my role, a County Judge in Texas is the presiding officer of the Commissioners Court, the governing body of the county. I represent all the citizens of the third most populous county in the United States.

Harris County is 1,756 square miles in area and home to 3.6 million residents, making it more populous than 23 states. There are 34 municipalities within the county, including the City of Houston, the fourth largest city in the country. More than 1.2 million people live in unincorporated Harris County and rely on the county to be the primary provider of basic government services.

As County Judge, I am charged by statute with the responsibility for emergency management planning and operations for Harris County. Most departments within Harris County have emergency functions in addition to their normal duties and play key roles in our emergency operations strategy. All departments work together to coordinate services and prepare for an emergency or disaster.

I want to thank the Committee for inviting me to testify on the role that Harris County played in providing shelter and comfort to Hurricane Katrina victims in what became the largest mass evacuation in US History at that a time. It is estimated that more than 373,000 evacuees came to Texas and more than 150,000 came to Harris County alone. Our response was an unprecedented coalition of the Harris County

government as well as the City of Houston, the State of Texas, the Federal government, the private sector, non-profit organizations, and citizen volunteers. The mission of the coalition was to provide temporary shelter, social services and relocation options for the citizens displaced by Hurricane Katrina. In less than a day a city was created which, at its peak, offered more than 27,000 people shelter, health care, child care, mental health services, housing assistance, travel vouchers, employment services, and much more. The population eventually became so large at the Reliant Park Complex that the US Postal Service assigned the complex its own zip code.

THE IMPACT ON HARRIS COUNTY FROM THE INFLUX OF PERSONS DISPLACED BY HURRICANE KATRINA

While it will be some time before we can fully assess the entire financial impact of our initial mission of sheltering Hurricane victims, I have asked all our county departments, and Mayor Bill White has asked his departments in the City of Houston, to keep an accurate accounting of expenses that are directly related to this mission. We should be able to know within a few months the extent of these expenses. I have been assured that FEMA will pay for most of our expenses, but there will be a number of expenses that will not be reimbursed. I will try to point those out today.

There are two cost centers upon which we are concentrating. One is the cost of sheltering evacuees, and those expenses will be relatively straightforward and quantifiable. We are also trying to predict the long-term impact on our county of absorbing the cost of a sudden spike in population of individuals who have sustained such severe losses and who trying to start their lives over while living in our area. We also question the consequences of evacuees who choose to remain long-term or permanently in our county and our state. According to the Washington Post, a poll by conducted the Post, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, and the Harvard School of Public Health that was released September 15, 2005, shows that fewer than half of all New Orleans evacuees living in emergency shelters in Houston say they will move back home, while two-thirds of those who want to relocate plan to settle permanently in the Houston area.

Hurricane Katrina Houston Response Unified Command

As we watched Hurricane Katrina intensify in the Gulf of Mexico after passing over Florida and approach New Orleans, it became clear that the threat was serious and growing. On Sunday, August 28, 2005, I visited with Jack Colley, the State Coordinator of Governor Rick Perry's Division of Emergency Management (GDEM). He asked if the Reliant Astrodome was capable of housing potentially as many as 2,000 evacuees, should the need arise. I assured him that we would do whatever necessary to make our facilities available.

When the levees breached on August 30 and New Orleans began to flood, it forced the evacuation of the Superdome, where residents had gone for initial sheltering. I received a call at 3:00 a.m. on Wednesday, August 31, from Jack Colley asking me to implement our plan to open the Reliant Astrodome to evacuees who would be coming to us from the Superdome that night. The number of evacuees he expected grew to 23,750.

At approximately 6:00 a.m. on August 31, 2005 we began to organize the Hurricane Katrina Houston Response Unified Command under the Harris County Emergency Management Basic Plan. We created a relatively flat unified incident command center in accordance with the National Incident Management System (NIMS) at the Reliant Park Complex composed of the Federal government, the State of Texas, Harris County, the City of Houston, and non-governmental organizations. The Reliant Park Complex which includes the Reliant Astrodome, the Reliant Arena, and the Reliant Center is managed by SMG Management. Other non-governmental organizations include Aramark Food Services, which provided all food services in the Reliant Park Complex; Contemporary Services Corporation (CSC), which provided security; the Red Cross which provided shelter operations; and numerous other charitable organizations.

We also recognized that with such a large number of evacuees, we would need to have a strong and unified communication to those housed in our facilities, to those

evacuees in other shelters and motel and hotels in Harris County and in other parts of Texas and other states, to our volunteers, to our citizens, and to the news media covering the event. The Joint Information Center (JIC) was established in the Reliant Astrodome headed by a Public Information Officer who was responsible for unified coordinated communications, both internally to the unified command and externally. We established an extensive telephone system and created an Internet Web page at www.hcjic.org that contained situation reports, press releases, media alerts, and other critical command announcements. We had frequent press conferences each day and media updates to keep the public informed about developments and to share information.

Another element of the JIC that gave us greater communication opportunities was the interoperable communication system that we have been developing in Harris and surrounding counties over the past 8 to 10 years. With a price tag in excess of \$250 million, neither Harris County, nor most counties around the country, are capable of purchasing such a system as a replacement for existing systems. What we have done is to develop our communication system in stages to give us the ability to communicate across jurisdictional and disciplinary lines. We are currently working to expand our system geographically and to have more mobile communication devices and lap top computers/ personal data assistants (PDA) with text and file transfer capabilities in the hands of our first responders. Our objective is to have streaming video capability so that first responders can send live video from the field back to incident command and better tactical decision-making can be done with real time information. With our system in the Reliant Park Complex we were able to respond to developing situations and bring in the correct professional and voluntary assistance to resolve problems as quickly as possible.

It is very important for Congress to continue to fund state and local government efforts to evolve or transform existing system capabilities to achieve interoperability. I know that in our situation we can't afford the downtime required to learn how to operate a new system, so we have chosen to make improvements in manageable bites that enhance rather than disrupt our capabilities. Congress and the federal agencies should create rules that set

minimum standards but allow local government the flexibility to work within their means to achieve those standards.

On September 20, 2005, at approximately 7:00 p.m. we announced that our mission had been completed and our unified command at the Reliant Park Complex was standing down after 21 days of around-the-clock operation. Lt. Joe Leonard of the US Coast Guard, who led the operation, said, "Our success is directly attributable to the strong personal relationships developed long before the Hurricane in Louisiana."

Many members of the Hurricane Katrina Houston Response Unified Command staff first worked as a team during the Tropical Storm Allison disaster that hit our community in June 2001. We learned a lot from responding to this disaster and then rebuilding our own community. We also developed those relationships over time by developing a coordinated emergency preparedness and response plan and then having serious and frequent training exercises to enable us to work the plan when incidents occur. These relationships were absolutely critical to the success of our mission.

Developing and working a plan requires complete communication, coordination, cooperation, and even friendships between emergency managers and professionals at all levels of government.

I urge Congress to continue to provide adequate funding to assist the funding provided by state and local governments as well as to provide incentives for thorough training and exercises. Lee Trevino, the great golfer, said it best, "The more you practice the luckier you get."

Based upon the risks facing a community, preparedness is ultimately defined differently in different areas of the country. Local leaders must determine the level of faith that their constituency have in their emergency response plan and improve it until citizens will follow the plan with the highest degree of confidence when an emergency arises.

The current model of a national plan with uniform standards for training, equipment, and procedures among state and local governments can work well. In extraordinary circumstances, such as those experienced during Hurricane Katrina, local first responders may be overwhelmed and an appropriate federal response should be developed to provide both emergency response and support for recovery efforts.

Sheltering/Food

We began housing evacuees in the Reliant Astrodome. It became apparent as the population grew that we could not safely house all of the evacuees that we expected in the Astrodome. The City of Houston's fire marshal ordered us to cap the evacuee population in the Astrodome at 8,000. Houston's mayor overrode his fire marshal and authorized up to 12,000 evacuees. Eventually the population inside the Astrodome would reach 17,500. As additional evacuees came in we included the Reliant Arena that housed 4,500 evacuees, while 2,300 were housed in the Reliant Center. The City of Houston opened the George R. Brown Convention Center downtown in order to handle 2,800 more.

Evacuees received hot meals and plenty of liquids and were able to sleep on cots with blankets and pillows. They were given comfort packages that included basic toiletry needs and, importantly, they were able to take a hot shower for the first time in several days. They were comforted by volunteers and were able for the first time to begin to have a feeling that they were finally in a secure location.

Not everything went as smoothly as I would have liked, but we were able to quickly adapt. Emergency planning coordinators in our Homeland Security & Emergency Management division had to learn on the fly what worked and what didn't work. Our plan was evolving continuously. Our Unified Command and the Joint Information Center allowed us to reach decisions more easily and to communicate changes and adaptations more quickly. We arranged communications between evacuees not only within our compound, but also in the various centers around the country to expedite reunification of families. We accomplished this by establishing television viewing

areas, telephone service areas, and Internet service areas. We also worked with airlines and bus companies to arrange tickets for travel to help families reunite.

Because the county is the landlord of the Reliant Park Complex and we have an ongoing relationship with SMG Management who manages the complex, we were able to get the lights and air conditioning turned on immediately so we could begin operations. The management team, with security assistance provided by CSC, was able to prepare various buildings within the complex and secure sensitive areas. Aramark, who already had the concession contract for the complex to provide food service, hired an additional 800 food service professionals in order to prepare meals to feed the masses when they arrived. We began food service on September 1 and continued until the mission was completed, having served some 450,000 meals.

Public Safety

As the buses started to arrive and the crowds grew, we had to add increasing numbers of law enforcement officers and fire safety crews to provide a safe environment for evacuees, workers and volunteers with tens of thousands of people in the controlled chaos that the complex became. We had to secure roadways, parking lots, and walk ways between all of the buildings in the complex as well as secure all of the buildings and protect evacuees and volunteers inside. We usually had at least 500 law enforcement and 50 EMS and fire safety personnel on site. Unlike the operating expenses for the complex and food service, the increased cost of public safety did not cease when the Hurricane Katrina Houston Response ended its mission.

As evacuees move to other shelters and find housing in our community, the sudden increased population of 150,000 will create increased and permanent demands for an immediate and proportional increase in public safety services. This sudden significant expansion of services will require an increased number of personnel and cause increased equipment costs. I urge Congress and the appropriate federal agencies to set aside a source of sustainable grant funding to allow us to pay for

these needs for at least a two-year period of time while our revenues from property taxes catch up with these increased needs.

Public Health

Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services (HCPHES) is responsible for promoting the health and safety of our county by preventing illness and injury. In a county of our size, that in itself is a large undertaking, but I am particularly proud of the accomplishments of HCPHES when I considering the enormous number of evacuees that arrived seeking relief in a highly vulnerable state. These evacuees were exposed to harsh conditions while awaiting transportation away from New Orleans, having already suffered in the worst possible living conditions, tightly packed together and highly susceptible to the spread of disease and infection.

Dr. Herminia Palacio, the HCPHES Executive, and Dr. Umair Shah, HCPHES Deputy Director, coordinated all medical operations conducted at the Reliant Park Complex. An additional 500 HCPHES staff performed approximately 15,000 Katrina-related hours of service for many critical duties at the Reliant Park Complex around the clock.

HCPHES professional staff participated in a wide variety of critically important activities such as immunization operations. They conducted a mass immunization clinic for evacuees and conducted epidemiological surveillance activities in order to detect and prevent disease outbreaks. They also conducted health assessments, syndromic surveillance among patients of the on-site medical facility, daily "cot checks" to assess reported health status, and monitored clinical data to identify any disease trends. They identified gastrointestinal illness and a number of infection-control measures were recommended and implemented. Other epidemiological surveillance activities are targeted to area hospitals, schools, other local shelters and the community at large.

Our HCPHES staff professionals conducted daily food safety, sanitation, and environmental health assessments at the Reliant Park Complex as well as among other area shelters housing evacuees. These assessments resulted in a number of

recommendations that were implemented regarding housekeeping practices, safe food handling procedures, and sanitation measures. They provided and continue to provide Women, Infants and Children (WIC) nutrition services to almost 600 eligible evacuees at HCPHES WIC clinics. Our animal control officers, veterinarians, and zoonosis epidemiology personnel participated in Katrina-related animal control/veterinary public health services, and HCPHES continue to assist the Houston SPCA with the handling of the pets of evacuees.

Future Demands on HCPHES because of Displaced Katrina Victims

In addition, HCPHES must address the medium- to long-term impacts on the public health infrastructure if an estimated 150,000 evacuees - many of whom have medical needs, may be uninsured, and do not have medical homes- elect to remain in Harris County. For example, this surge in the area's population may result in the following:

- Immunizations - In the short term, HCPHES will continue to coordinate with the Harris County Department of Education and the Department of State Health Services to ensure that all evacuee children enrolling in area schools are up-to-date on their immunizations. In the long-term, HCPHES will need to ensure access to immunization services for new residents, including both adults and children. For example, HCPHES will need to acquire additional influenza vaccine for the upcoming flu season and expand its capacity to provide influenza vaccine to at-risk persons.
- Epidemiology - In the short term, HCPHES will continue to conduct epidemiological surveillance activities among evacuee populations in area shelters, hospitals, schools, and the community at large. In the long-term, the anticipated population surge will impact day-to-day epidemiological surveillance activities, thus requiring HCPHES to increase its capacity to monitor relevant disease trends and ensure appropriate outbreak investigation.
- Environmental Health - In the short term, HCPHES will continue to conduct inspections at area shelters housing evacuees. In the long-term, the anticipated environmental impacts of a sudden increase in population will

require HCPHES to increase its capacity to assure water quality and food safety and to provide nuisance abatement services.

- Health Education - In the short term, HCPHES will continue to conduct activities to identify and prioritize acute public health issues of evacuee populations as they settle in the Harris County area. In the long term, issues of special concern may include child health, mental health, substance abuse, and violence. HCPHES will need to expand its capacity to provide population-based health education to communities at risk.
- Clinics - HCPHES operates five preventive health clinics throughout the community, providing immunizations, maternal and child health care, TB control, and preventive dental services. The anticipated population surge will result in an increased number of clients at HCPHES clinics, requiring HCPHES to expand its nursing, clerical, and managerial capacity.

I urge Congress to help us with these increased public health costs by creating a grant program that will supply us with funds as our needs are quantified. Without assistance with these increased costs our ability to protect our community from health risks may be seriously jeopardized.

Health Care

It had been only about 19 hours since the governor called and we had gone into action, when evacuees began arriving at 10:30 p.m. on August 31. As they arrived they were greeted by volunteers on the buses and briefed on what they could expect. Medical personnel triaged them for medical needs, and those needs were treated in a 100,000- square-foot, 2,500-bed state-of-the-art health center created in 18 hours that day with a comprehensive lab, X-ray and pharmacy capabilities, and dental and mental health services available onsite.

The overall health care operation was managed by the executive director of the Harris County Public Health & Environmental Services (HCPHES). This leadership was coupled with resources from Baylor College of Medicine and the Harris County Hospital District, the Harris County Children's Assessment Center, the Harris County Children's Protective Services, and the Mental Health and Mental Retardation

Authority of Harris County. Additionally, retired physicians from the Harris County Medical Society offered their services as did a host of other community health volunteers from various area hospitals, from around the country, and from around the world.

Ninety exam rooms were augmented with full triage and electronic patient registration. Field medical records were created for every patient. Comprehensive lab, pharmacy, and x-ray capability were available on site. Approximately 900 patients were triaged and treated at the clinic with subsequent transfer to area hospitals. Ten percent of these patients were admitted.

This extraordinary and, in many ways, unprecedented effort was led by Dr. Kenneth L. Mattox, Chief of the Medical Staff for Ben Taub General Hospital; Mr. George Masi, Chief Operating Officer for the Harris County Hospital District; and Dr. Thomas Gavagan and Mrs. Alicia Reyes from the Hospital District's Community Health Program.

Our medical teams administered 10,000 tetanus shots and other inoculations as well as filling more than 15,000 prescriptions. The 2,700 volunteer doctors and other medical professionals examined some 4,000 patients in the Reliant Arena between opening on Thursday morning, September 1, and mid-afternoon on September 2, and at one point they evaluated 749 patients in one three-hour period. There were 570 mental health clinicians who volunteered and treated more than 4,300 individuals with mental health concerns. There were 14 hospitalized with psychiatric needs. There were 80 patients on first day of operation, many of whom were diabetics who'd gone without insulin for days and who were sent to the Ben Taub General Hospital for more extensive treatment. Ultimately we saw 15,000 patients in the medical clinic at a cost of more than \$4 million in the 15 days we were operational at the Reliant Arena Clinic.

When evacuees continued to arrive and we ran out of space at the Reliant Park Complex, we began to shelter in the George R. Brown Convention Center, which is

about 10 miles from the complex. There we opened a second clinic staffed by physicians from the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, aided by federalized physicians under the public health service, where we saw 500 to 700 patients per day and ultimately saw more than 10,000 patients including shelter residents and evacuees living in the community.

These totals from the Reliant Arena Clinic and the Brown Center Clinic do not include all of those patients that were sent to hospitals and trauma centers in our Hospital District due to more serious needs. I cannot stress enough the magnitude of this accomplishment and the number of lives saved of those who arrived in Houston under the direst circumstances. We are tremendously proud of the efforts of our health care professionals and volunteers in this endeavor.

Future Demands on The Harris County Hospital District and the Harris County Mental Health and Mental Retardation Authority (MHMRA)

We anticipate a severe local impact on our Hospital District from evacuees that remain in our county for some time into the future and a large number who remain permanently and have little or no means to pay for medical service or health care. Considering the trauma these evacuees have been through they are a particularly vulnerable population. Our Hospital District, like most safety net providers around the country, is highly vulnerable to spikes in costs and operating expenses. We have been very efficient and have worked hard to provide health care delivery to our neediest population.

With this concern in mind, I was extremely pleased Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Michael O. Leavitt proposed and Mark McClellan, Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, finalized on September 17, 2005, an agreement that the federal government will pay the full costs for out-of-state residents who qualify for Medicaid, mainly children and low-income elderly and disabled adults. Other evacuees not eligible for Medicaid will be able to visit doctors and receive prescriptions through an uncompensated care pool, with the federal government fully reimbursing the state. Additionally, Administrator McClellan will also monitor the potential for continuing costs for Texas and Harris County after the

program runs out in January 2006. This will help us through the initial period of absorbing this population into our community and allow us to determine what future demands may be as a result of the new population.

Another concern we have is whether we can meet the long-term needs of a significant number of patients who are in crisis mode from substance abuse withdrawal. Our physicians from MHMRA determined that somewhere between 30 percent and 50 percent of patients in the Reliant Complex have needed substance-abuse treatment. With this jump in case load, our substance-abuse treatment community will be asked to handle the potential long-term workload and the increase in treatment expenses. Congress should be prepared to provide funds to help us get through this sudden increased cost in serving this population as we work in coalition with other agencies and organizations to curtail this problem.

Other County Departments Response to the Katrina Disaster

This was truly an all county effort, and most of our county departments participated in the relief operation by assisting evacuees directly or supporting those that did. We are still assessing the expenses that were incurred and will know the extent of the reimbursement we will be seeking, but our estimates total more than \$1 million for these departments in just the first two weeks of the operation.

- **Children's Assessment Center** --This agency supported the mental health needs of children at the Reliant Complex. Expenses include salaries, contract therapists and supplies.
- **Commissioners Precincts**-- Commissioner Pct .1, El Franco Lee; Commissioner Pct. 2, Sylvia Garcia; Commissioner Pct. 3, Steve Radack; and Commissioner Pct. 4, Jerry Eversole provided buses for various purposes including medical transport and taking individuals from shelters to other temporary housing. Pct. 1 supported various community-based shelter operations and also opened and operates two temporary shelters for evacuees having their own transportation.
- **Constables**-- All Constable Precincts provided security and related services for shelter operations that were not at the Reliant Park Complex.

- **County Attorney, Mike Stafford**-- Advised various agencies and officials on legal matters related to the operation.
- **County Library**-- The library system made computers available primarily for Internet access for evacuees seeking assistance and locating lost relatives. The library also provided library services to evacuees at the Reliant Center.
- **District Clerk, Charles Bacarisse**-- Assisted child support activities for evacuees by helping them get child support payments forwarded to the right location.
- **Domestic Relations**-- The Family Court Services Division has provided mental health assistance at the Reliant complex in partnership with Youth and Family Services.
- **Fire and Emergency Service**-- Provided fire protection services and fire prevention advice related to shelter operations. The Harris County Fire Marshal's office was part of the operation command staff.
- **Housing and Community Development**-- Provided food, temporary shelter and related services to evacuees.
- **Information Technology Center**-- Provided support for computer and communications for shelter operations.
- **Juvenile Probation**-- 95 staff members provided services for juveniles in the shelter effort
- **Medical Examiner**-- Provided services related to deceased evacuees.
- **Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management**-- Initially established operations and continued support service for incident command.
- **Sheriff, Tommy Thomas**-- Coordinated security and provided law enforcement protection for the Reliant Park Complex.
- **Social Services**-- Provided transportation to and from the shelters at the Reliant Park Complex to the Harris County Housing Authority at Lantern Point for voucher applicants and then transported applicants to housing developments around the county.

- **Tax Assessor Collector**, Paul Bettencourt-- Provided personnel to the emergency management center, the County Judge's office, the joint information center and other operations so service levels could be maintained.

The Role of the Harris County Citizen Corps

After the September 11 terrorist attack, President Bush called upon all Americans to dedicate at least two years of their lives – the equivalent of 4,000 hours – in service to others. He launched the USA Freedom Corps initiative to inspire and enable all Americans to find ways to serve their community and country. The Citizen Corps is a component of the Freedom Corps. In August 2002, I launched the Harris County Citizen Corps to create opportunities for individuals to volunteer to help their neighborhoods prepare for and respond to emergencies by bringing together local leaders, citizen volunteers, and the network of first responder organizations, such as fire and police departments. The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Program is a subset of the Citizen Corps. This program educates people about disaster preparedness and trains them in basic disaster response skills such as fire safety, light search and rescue, and disaster medical operations. Using their training, CERT members can assist others in their neighborhood or workplace following an event and can take a more active role in preparing their community.

The program is administered by the US Department of Homeland Security as part of the National Plan for community preparedness. It was the Citizen Corps with some 7,000 volunteers, including more than 1,200 CERT members, that made our relief efforts possible. Our volunteers came from all walks of life and disciplinary backgrounds. They were organized, trained, and had already volunteered collectively more than 200,000 hours of community service.

We realized that we were going to need at least as many, if not more, volunteers than the number of evacuees we were going to shelter. Estimates were enormous not only for Harris County but for the entire State of Texas. When the initial e-mail was sent out to the Citizen Corps seeking volunteers at about 9:00 a.m. on August 31, we

were overjoyed when we had 1,000 volunteers in the first hour and more coming in continuously.

I can assure you that without these volunteers and tens of thousands more who came forward through the organization of Citizens Corps, we could not have responded to the disaster as we did. Volunteers were organized into teams, and the newly recruited volunteers were given orientation upon arrival and then assignments in all areas of service to the evacuees. I am particularly proud to report that our citizens in Harris County acted with courage, compassion, and unity. We had more than 60,000 volunteers come forward, and they were absolutely essential to the success of this operation.

I have spoken to many volunteers who said that they experienced something during this operation that brought personal rewards far beyond their expectations. They accomplished the near impossible with kindness and compassion in a situation unparalleled in anyone's experience. In the future I envision taking our Citizen Corps and CERT members to the next level by organizing them within many more neighborhoods so they are capable of being truly the first responders to an incident, while they await the arrival of professional first responders. In the role of neighbor helping neighbor, our CERT members and Citizen Corps volunteers will be able to communicate with incident command regarding situation reports on the ground and be prepared to assist neighbors who need help. I can see the Citizen Corps volunteers being able to assess the capabilities and needs of their neighbors in the event of a needed evacuation and being able to communicate those needs to the incident command to expedite evacuations more smoothly. A network like this could also provide a head-count and location of those who refuse to evacuate.

I urge Congress to continue to provide the funding necessary to help us further develop our Citizen Corps, to develop Citizen Corps in more communities around the country, and to provide the funding for training of CERT members. Training and organization will be the key to our success. I would like to invite each of you to come

to Harris County to see first hand how our Citizen Corps operates and to see where we are in our development and where we plan to be.

The Role of the Faith Based Community

Organized through Houston's Second Baptist Church (www.second.org) and its pastor, Dr. Ed Young, an interfaith ministry made up of a dozen denominations came together for Operation Compassion. Collectively they organized and provided Red Cross training for 43,500 additional volunteers. Of these, 17,300 volunteers served 109,613 meals in the George R. Brown Convention Center to the evacuees there. They also produced nearly 90,000 personal hygiene kits.

Another organization, Interfaith Ministries of Greater Houston, (www.imgh.org) has organized a program called Neighbors 2 Neighbors (www.neighbors2neighbors.org), where volunteers are matched with evacuees who have found housing. Most of these people have no transportation, don't know their neighborhoods or the city, and don't know how to get their services started. The objective is to help them adjust to life in Harris County and their new surroundings.

The Houston Area Pastors Council, Catholic Charities, and many other faith based organizations provided countless hours of service and opened their homes and places of worship to evacuees. This outpouring of volunteerism made it possible to serve evacuees at the Convention Center and to make them more comfortable as they worked through the process of seeking more permanent housing.

Corporate Community

Many Houston area corporations, from Fortune 500 to smaller regional companies, stepped into the forefront to support the Katrina relief effort. CenterPoint Energy provided IT support for the GRB Shelter operations, built showers for the George R. Brown Shelter, and helped start the transitional housing Task Force. Jim MacIngvale of Gallery Furniture provided the "Town Center" with recreational facilities from the YMCA for the Reliant Park shelters as well as thousands of cans of baby formula and other support. Tilman J. Fertitta of Landry's Restaurants loaned helicopter support to

supplement Houston Police Department aerial surveys. Continental Airlines offered air transport to reunite families. John Nau and Silver Eagle Distributing Co. provided thousands of cans of water for Katrina evacuees in Houston and in the Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama disaster zone.

Maintaining support for a response infrastructure is difficult for local and state governments. For future events, the corporate community has business continuation plans and resources beyond those of local governments. Emergency preparedness is a high priority for the Houston area today, but that commitment could fall through the cracks as political leadership and priorities change. A “virtual organization” with a sustainable response capability could be built around the corporate community in Harris County and the greater Houston region. Future plans should include these community resources. Congress should look for ways to encourage corporate support for community preparedness.

Charitable Giving

In addition to providing volunteers, faith based organizations, corporations and individuals contributed more than \$7 million to help Katrina victims. Those contributions made it possible to provide comfort to the victims and help them begin the long road of recovery. Houstonians and residents of Harris County brought, literally, mountains of clothes to help victims and brought toys and books for children. When volunteers got to know the victims better, they would bring some of their favorite things like cookies and other favorite dishes.

Volunteers worked endless hours to help victims find family members and get information on the Red Cross and FEMA Debit Cards and other benefits. It was the volunteers and those who made contributions to Katrina victims who defined the character of our community, and I am overwhelmed with our spirit of caring and giving.

City of Houston Mayor Bill White and I have established the Houston Katrina Relief Fund (www.houstonkatrinarelief.org) that will raise money to help evacuees and to transition them from shelters into the community.

Current and Future Needs of Katrina Evacuees

Current and Future Housing Needs

City of Houston Mayor Bill White sent a letter to our congressional delegation on September 7, 2005, that describes our combined housing needs. We are working closely to solve our housing shortages and to find new housing for Katrina victims, while not overlooking the needs of our citizens. I concur with his requests for our needs to address this concern.

Our community wants to give our new residents, survivors of Katrina, the opportunity to get out of shelters and into suitable housing, so they can begin taking responsibility for rebuilding their own futures with dignity and respect. Our goal is to provide the opportunity and the tools to do so. I urge Congress and the appropriate federal agencies to work with us to reach this goal.

1. Housing Vouchers. We have integrated the Harris County Housing Authority, the Houston Housing Authority, the New Orleans Housing Authority, the local personnel of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the private sector into a regional organization. This organization has moved several thousand people into apartments and other housing, but we need authority for up to 125,000 more housing vouchers. These should be available for 6 to 18 months and should have the same financial terms for monthly payments as do Section 8 HUD Housing for the relevant square foot categories. We urge that a local HUD representative be given the power to create emergency rules and procedures concerning the standards and suitability of housing, so that we can provide suitable facilities and as soon as possible. We will create extraordinary local permitting and inspection procedures to complement this federal authority.

2. Reimbursement for Furnishings. We need express authority for FEMA to supersede normal criteria to allow for reimbursement for furnishings of new housing units. Hundreds of rental units have been renovated and furnished and put on the market, as well as spaces in abandoned nursing facilities which have been renovated and furnished. This process will continue. There need to be general guidelines of reasonableness and efficiency, but we simply cannot lease a sufficient volume of furnishings to get people back on their feet quickly.

3. Grants and Credit Enhancements for New Housing Stock.

More than 200 owners of apartment facilities with rooms available have signed master agreements for running the terms and conditions for suitable vacant apartment units. Several thousand are available and we have added to this inventory every day. This should include suitable housing stock from outside this region. The victims will be provided this information as soon as possible, and will not be "pushed out" or "pulled in." Nonetheless, we need an immediate and major expansion of the suitable stock for housing for this metropolitan area. Residents of this region, who have taken in far, far more of the victims than any other community, should not feel that we have compromised the availability of affordable housing of Houston residents and businesses.

For this reason, we are asking for a grant of \$48 million, made in equal parts to the Harris County Housing Authority, the Houston Housing Authority, and the Houston Housing Finance Corporation, to provide equity financing or credit enhancement to accelerate existing federal programs for multi-family housing. For each of these public housing agencies, we have approved a plan for the use of these funds for project development, single-family assistance, down payment assistance, and credit-enhancement mechanisms. Eligibility should not be confined to Katrina victims so long as they are located in heavy impact areas. Moving existing residents of a multi-family facility into a single family or duplex residence is the fastest and most efficient means of expanding the amount of apartment units available to Katrina victims and containing rent inflation.

We need credit enhancement by FHA for multi-family new construction and permanent loans. We need to modify the 221(d)3 program to provide bona fide commitments within 60 days of application so that developers have predictability for their financing. We need to modify HUD mortgage insurance premiums to be "paid as you" go rather than in advance and lower premiums from 50 basis points to 25 basis points. We need to enhance tax credit programs for affordable housing to the Qualified Tax Credit bonus (a 30% step up in basis for calculating the amount of credits) to include the entire Houston MSA (not limited to Qualified Census Tracts). We need to modify the tax credit rules to allow taxation of income eligibility requirements in the first year tax credit period and not only subsequent years. Areas of heavy impact should receive a larger allocation of tax credits for the next two years. Allocations to states are based on a per capita formula.

4. Local Administrative infrastructure and Support. We must receive direct grants for reimbursement for any reasonable direct administrative costs for the implementation of the Katrina Housing Program. We cannot cannibalize the resources available to the tens of thousands of the Houston region who are served by these existing agencies. We are already drawing in the resources of the remnants of the New Orleans Housing Authority and need the ability to hire professionals for this undertaking. These funds should be allocated directly to Harris County and Houston in proportion to the existing budgets of their housing agencies. Ten million dollars (\$10 million) should be set aside for this purpose. An amount should be provided for the reconstitution of the New Orleans and other Louisiana housing Authorities based upon their budgets before the Katrina disaster.

Jobs/Job Training

Katrina victims won't begin to recover their losses and their lives until they are able to find suitable employment and begin earning income. The Texas Workforce Commission, The Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, Louisiana Department of Labor, The Work Source, and other groups have been

working hard to help Katrina victims receive Disaster Unemployment Assistance and other benefits until jobs become available. While Houston and Harris County are very capable of creating jobs for those who wish to work, I think we need to create incentives for private employers to provide jobs and job training.

I urge Congress and the appropriate federal agencies to create incentives for training by creating special grants on a per capita basis for job training for new hires. Impact areas should be defined by the size of the population of evacuees. We should not, however, create a system which creates an employment opportunity bias for Katrina victims compared to other residents. Employers who hire Katrina victims that do not need job training should be afforded the opportunity for tax credits that encourage job creation. This program should not unfairly favor Katrina victims over residents in competing for existing jobs.

Childrens Issues

The Harris County Youth and Family Services Division was a first responder to the social and emotional needs of Katrina victims evacuated to the Reliant Park Complex. Harris County Protective Services for Children and Adults (HCPS), a member agency of the Youth and Family Services Division, immediately responded to the needs of Katrina evacuees under the leadership of George Ford, Executive Director. Counseling services at the Mental Health area at Reliant Arena were coordinated by the Children's Assessment Center, a member agency at the Youth and Family Service Division. Thirty of our clinical staff provided mental health and other social services at the Reliant Park Complex. The critical needs of more than 15,000 Katrina victims were addressed within the first week of the operation.

Schools

Public school systems in the State of Texas responded rapidly to the needs of more than 41,000 school-age children who were evacuated as a result of Katrina. More than 15,000 of these children that were in the Greater Harris County Area were able to begin classes on September 6, 2005, the Tuesday after Labor Day. Four of the largest school districts in Harris and Fort Bend Counties have the following Katrina related enrollment:

Fort Bend Independent School District : 2,300

Alief Independent School District: 2,400

Aldine Independent School District: 1,000

Houston Independent School District: 5,100

Early in the transition, the Houston Independent School District opened the Fleming, Ryan, and Douglas Elementary Schools specifically for the children housed in the Reliant Park Complex. As families leave the Reliant Park Complex and move into the community the children will attend the public schools nearest their residences.

Help Needed for our Public Schools

This sudden increase of students in our area school districts could ultimately be a serious financial problem in the short term as well in the long term if a majority of students remain in our area as permanent residents. I am grateful to our senior Senator, Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, for her quick recognition and response to this potential crisis in our public school system. Her bill, S. 1764, which provides for the continued education of students affected by Hurricane Katrina, passed the Senate on September 22, 2005, by unanimous consent. I am hopeful that the House of Representatives will pass this measure quickly so our school districts can continue to operate smoothly without compromising the quality of education for our existing students.

Youth Services

HCPS Community Youth Services (CYS) school-based youth specialists are located in secondary schools in 18 school districts. They have provided social services to hundreds of Katrina evacuee youth newly enrolled in local schools. These services include grief crisis counseling, information and referral services for ongoing therapy and social services, and assistance in obtaining immediate family needs.

A team of multi-disciplinary clinical HCPS staff at the Children's Crisis Care Center provided initial developmental and psychological evaluations of the children taken into the custody of the Texas Department of Family Protective Services (TDFPS) from Katrina shelters and then provided findings within a short time to the state

Permanency Planning Team charged with planning for children's needs while in protective custody.

The Harris County Protective Services for Children and Adults worked closely with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) Region 6 to lead the Harris County region's state child welfare response and staffed the "Lost Children's Area" at the Reliant Park Complex. Thus far the state of Texas DFPS has taken 14 children into protective custody in Region 6 as a result of Katrina, mainly because parents or relatives of these young children have not been located to care for them. Most of these children have been returned to parents/caregivers. However, we anticipate a significant increase in the number of Katrina evacuee children entering protective custody as a result of abuse and neglect. Some parents will exhibit decompensation of coping skills leading to exacerbation of pre-existing psychiatric and substance abuse conditions. These parents may require psychiatric hospitalizations and/or substance abuse treatment.

Future Demands on HCPS because of Displaced Katrina Victims

Harris County has responded with concern and immediate services to the victims of Katrina, however, we are very aware that there are many thousands of evacuees that we have not served, as they are staying in hotels, motels, other shelters, or with family or friends in the area. An estimated 25,000 persons are now living in the Harris County and surrounding area due to the Katrina evacuation. As Texas, and especially Houston, transitions from immediate response to long-term planning we must develop a team effort to ensure that evacuees find more permanent housing, good jobs and the assistance needed to get back on their feet and promote good mental health.

Two specific areas of concern for the mental health needs of children and families in the aftermath of Katrina are evident. They include:

1. Increased children entering foster care: Many parents under tremendous stress after the devastating losses they experienced as a result of Hurricane Katrina will be overwhelmed by parenting responsibilities. These

stressors will lead to some parents abusing, neglecting and/or abandoning children. These children may ultimately come into protective custody and live in temporary emergency youth shelters or foster homes. They will experience significant loss and anxiety, combined with post-traumatic stress symptoms related to Katrina events. Anticipated child mental health needs include:

- a. Child and Family assessments, counseling, substance abuse screenings and social service assistance to stabilize Katrina-affected families whose children will return to them in the future.
- b. Grief and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder counseling: Individual and group counseling for the children in foster care related to Katrina.
- c. Education for foster parents regarding children's reaction to trauma and how to intervene
- d. Substance abuse assessments, referrals, and treatment for parents or caregivers

2. School-age children's mental health: All evacuee school-age children are being integrated into our local school districts, and their mental health needs will most likely be evident through school-related incidents. Although not all of the children and youth experienced the devastating events like those that were initially housed in the New Orleans Superdome and evacuated to Houston's Astrodome/Reliant Center shelters, it is certain that ALL children experienced significant losses including their homes, schools, friends, family, and supports such as churches. We anticipate that many of them will experience stress-related physical illnesses (examples: increased asthma episodes, sleep disorders, stomach disorders, headaches), and many will exhibit behavioral changes inconsistent with their pre-Katrina lives. These changes will include sadness, anxiety, inability to sleep well, irritability, displaced anger and aggression, decreased ability to concentrate on schoolwork, hypervigilance, and other post-traumatic stress related behaviors. We anticipate the following needs:

- Training of school personnel, childcare staff, and mental health professionals regarding how to help children cope with their significant losses.
- Additional CYS school-based youth service staff to augment the current counseling/social work staff available to Katrina victims already in Harris County schools. We need to place CYS workers in pre-K and elementary schools, as well as Head Start and other childcare facilities.
- Additional counseling and support services (grief counseling, PTSD-related counseling, group counseling, family counseling, family supports, non-custodial shelter needs of students and their families)
- Increased psychiatric services for those children with severe emotional disturbances (SED) who may need psychiatric hospitalization for stabilization, short-term residential treatment, and on-going psychiatric/medical management.
- System-of-care wraparound services for Katrina-affected children and youth with moderate to severe mental health issues and their families.

I urge Congress to appropriate funds necessary to support and the appropriate federal agency to create and administer a grant program that will allow us to address these future demands placed on HCPS to work with the future mental health needs of children families in their healing process.

Lessons Learned/How Can We Become Better Prepared

Pay for Regular Time for Reassigned Employees

There are two strong disincentives for communities to accept evacuees that should be addressed and rectified. The typical disaster declaration will pay only for overtime for qualified first responders and other professionals. This is because the community where the disaster is declared would have normally paid the regular time of these workers and the overtime is *extraordinary* time caused by the disaster. In accommodating evacuees from another community our citizens had to forego the

services of these qualified workers and yet pay for those services even though they were reassigned to serve the evacuee population.

The Executive Director of the HCPHES demonstrated quite well what this means to our constituents. In a press release dated September 5, 2005 she informed the public that there would be delays in service while she and another 500 HCPHES professional staff members provided public health services to the evacuees at the Reliant Park Complex. She also advised the public that there would be a temporarily reduced staff at each of our five health clinics and that she anticipated there would be an increased number of individuals accessing the WIC program. She warned that residents who utilize our public health services may experience a longer than normal “wait-time” while staff responded to this relief effort, and she asked for patience while this inconvenience lasted.

This concern applies not only to our public health workers, but also to all of our employees who participated in this operation. They were reassigned from normal duties, and those duties went unfulfilled, yet we still have to pay for that regular time. For example, the Harris County Sheriff’s Office incurred expenses for a little more than \$1 million during the sheltering operation. Of that, about 80% or \$800,000 was regular time that was paid by Harris County taxpayers even though these officers were not performing their regularly assigned duties. This is blatantly unfair to our citizens and is a serious disincentive to local governments to accept a request to host evacuees. I urge Congress and FEMA to recognize the need for an exception to existing policy and for Congress to provide sufficient funding to pay for regular time for reassigned workers.

Pay for Lost Revenue from Cancelled Programs at Public Facilities

It is also a strong disincentive for local governments to use their convention centers and other public facilities for evacuee shelters, because FEMA will not reimburse for lost income. Harris County, the City of Houston, and our enterprise funds lost millions of dollars in revenue that is needed to meet debt service schedules. Millions of dollars will be lost due to canceled events in the Reliant Park Complex and the

George R. Brown Convention Center. Harris County's convention center and sports venues are not supported by property or sales taxes. Our reimbursement schedules have been thrown off, and we may face penalties and additional interest. I urge Congress and FEMA to reimburse this loss of income.

Increase Funding and Relax Regulations for Flood Control Projects

In witnessing the catastrophic consequences of Hurricane Katrina to our neighbors to the east, it is natural to reflect on how a similar event would affect Harris County and to evaluate our strategies and tactics in dealing with our natural risk of flooding. While many lessons will be learned about emergency management and response, there are also lessons to be learned about approaches to flood management and communicating risk.

All things carefully considered, Katrina, as well as Tropical Storm Allison, have reinforced the flood damage reduction strategies and tactics used in Harris County. We build projects to reduce the risk, we buy out homes hopelessly deep in the flood plain, and we communicate the remaining risk to the public. We also take very good care of what is built so it functions to its full capacity when needed.

Devising and implementing flood damage reduction projects takes time and money. Adequate funding from all levels of government is the key to making continued and measured progress to reduce the risk. We will all be judged by how much is built between flood events.

It is important that Congress provide more funding to operate and maintain existing flood control structures in our country and to build new and improved flood control structures for higher levels of protection. Congress must address these concerns with increased funding and more relaxed regulations to speed the completion of projects that protect our citizens and communities. It is clear that the cost of response to and recovery from disasters is far greater than the cost of projects designed to provide protection.

The Corps of Engineers must be able to use endangerment and suffering in the calculation of the benefit of a project in order to justify it. Many good projects with a benefit/cost ratio greater than 1 to 1 remain unfunded because of reduced funding. The higher the property values that are calculated into the project benefit, the easier it is to get the 3 to 1 ratio currently required to justify a project. This unfairly penalizes areas of lower economic status and must be changed.

Tropical Storm Allison was the costliest tropical storm in U.S. history at that time. We had 72,000 homes flooded when we received rains of about 28 inches in 12 hours. The Texas Medical Center alone sustained more than \$2.0 billion in damages, with property damage countywide at more than \$5.0 billion. But we have managed to make it through that disaster and are rebuilding our community with federal assistance, working hard to protect ourselves from future disasters.

We still have several flood control projects in various stages of completion, but funding levels are low while requirements and regulations are increasing. This causes delays in project completion that keeps us at risk longer. I believe that we learned a lot from Katrina, but adequate funding for flood control may be the first step in preventing the next similar disaster.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I want to thank you again for allowing me to discuss our experience in this operation and for taking the time to study the response to this disaster. I hope our experience can be helpful to other communities if they are called upon to respond to a disaster in this way. I hope those communities will benefit from the things that worked for us and that they can improve upon those things that did not. I also hope that Congress will not leave us out alone on the financial ledge and will be responsive when we come back to tell you that we need reimbursement for Katrina-related expenses.