

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Report on the Commonwealth's Emergency Shelter Capabilities and Readiness

Item 393 (B) of the 2014 Appropriations Act

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Governor, Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security, Director of the Department of Planning and Budget, and the Chairmen of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees

FROM: State Coordinator of Emergency Management

FOR: State Sheltering Coordinator

SUBJECT: Report on the Commonwealth's Emergency Shelter Capabilities and Readiness

This report is prepared to satisfy the requirements of Item 393 (B) of the 2014 Appropriations Act; “by October 1 of each year, the Coordinator shall provide a status report on the Commonwealth's emergency shelter capabilities and readiness to the Governor, the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security, the Director of the Department of Planning and Budget, and the Chairmen of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees. The report ensures the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) is making progress on the requirements of Senate Bill 381 of 2014 as follows.

“The Secretary shall be responsible for the coordination and development of state and local shelter, evacuation, traffic, and refuge of last resort planning. The Secretary shall ensure that jurisdictions and subdivisions of the Commonwealth have adequate shelter, evacuation, traffic, and refuge of last resort plans to support emergency evacuation in the event of a man-made or natural disaster. To that end, the Secretary shall direct VDEM to monitor, review, and evaluate on a cyclical basis all shelter, evacuation, traffic, and refuge of last resort plans to ensure they are feasible and suitable and can be implemented with available resources.”

On August 15, Jeffrey D. Stern, state coordinator, sent the “In-Season Hurricane Review Report” to the Governor. This report included the “completed review of the hurricane preparedness in the Hampton Roads region.” This review included a hard look at the capabilities and readiness to shelter hurricane evacuees. The approach for this review was multi-fold, consisting of numerous meetings with local governments, engagement through several existing inter-governmental and inter-agency work groups at the regional and state level, in-depth stakeholder engagement, and federal assistance from Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) National Protection and Programs Directorate (NPPD).

Additionally, Witt O'Brien's, a private company with experience in hurricane preparedness and response, was contracted to provide an independent look at the review process, to research best practices in other states, and to validate (or invalidate) proposed enhancements and strategic initiatives through an exercise with local stakeholders.

The report indicates, "inadequate sheltering exists at the local and state level for citizens seeking refuge. Commonwealth plans for the past decade have focused on state-managed sheltering at remote sites far away from the Hampton Roads region. Renewed emphasis must be placed on building shelter capacity within the region and ensuring that those shelters are adequate to withstand storm winds. Only eight local shelters in the Hampton Roads region are known to be capable of withstanding Category 2 (CAT-2) storms. Building codes have not addressed the requirements for storm wind protection adequately."

In order to begin to address the gaps in current plans, VDEM is commencing with the hiring process for a shelter coordinator position, as called for in a recent Joint Legislative Audit & Review Commission (JLARC) study, Senate Bill 381 of 2014, and funded by the state legislature in Item 393 (B) of the 2014 Appropriations Act.

As VDEM works to hire the position, we continue to assist localities in tackling big regional problems. Virginia would like to assist individual localities with solving local problems through pilot projects with the intent that solutions will be shared and modeled for all the localities in the Commonwealth.

Specifically, future projects to increase the sheltering capabilities and readiness will focus on the short- and long-term recommendation made in the 2014 In-Season Review.

Short-Term Enhancements

- **Sheltering Coordinator:** VDEM is commencing with the hiring process for a shelter coordinator. The Employee Work Profile (work description/performance plan) has been submitted for approval to the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security. This position will report directly to the State Coordinator or Chief Deputy of Emergency Management.
- **Re-open State Homeland Security Grant Program (SHSGP) Funds to Support Shelter Projects:** The 2014 SHSGP program grant period was re-opened to allow for additional sheltering projects to be proposed by local governments.

Long-Term Strategic Recommendations

The following long-term strategic recommendations can be implemented in the next 18-24 months.

- Localities should apply to use the State Homeland Security Grant Program funds for upgrading shelter resiliency.
- Virginia should reevaluate and/or enhance state-managed shelter (SMS) procedures with input from local governments.
- Virginia should encourage each locality to increase its shelter capacity and capability.
- Virginia and localities should consider alternatives to alleviate staffing limitations.
- Virginia should encourage congregate care facilities to have robust emergency action plans.
- Localities should share local shelters and related information with the state. Shelters should be identified by hazard/risk levels for which they are viable (not just hurricanes).
- Virginia should consider conducting an engineering assessment of currently identified shelter buildings.
- Virginia should provide incentives or enhancements to localities to retrofit shelter facilities to higher wind/storm ratings.
- Virginia should identify building codes guidelines to increase shelter resiliency.
- Virginia should create a list of anticipated resources needed for state and local shelters.

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Enclosure: 2014 In-Season Review of Hurricane Preparedness for Hampton Roads Report to Governor Terence R. McAuliffe, August 2014