



**FEMA**

December 5, 2008

Dr. G. Kemble Bennett  
Office of the Vice Chancellor  
Texas A&M University  
301 Wisenbaker  
College Station, TX 77843-3126

Dear Dr. Bennett:

Thank you for the National Advisory Council's (NAC) recent recommendation regarding the addition of Regional Disability Coordinators to "multiply FEMA personnel available to be present in Joint Field Offices to coordinate and support outreach to victims with special needs when disaster strikes." This recommendation is very instructive for the Agency's commitment to meet the needs of persons with disabilities and special needs during disasters.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) agrees that additional help is needed to implement fully the Agency's commitment to inclusion, access, and outreach for persons with disabilities and special needs during disasters. Accordingly, the Office of Equal Rights has been directed to prepare a budget initiative to establish a new disability coordinator position for each region, with sufficient funds to meet mission objectives. However, it is likely that the existing budget process will not move funding action on this initiative until FY2011.

Notwithstanding the budget initiative, the importance of continued effective integration of FEMA's response to the needs of persons with disabilities and special needs populations into the Agency's disaster response requires that some immediate action be taken. It is important that FEMA provides the most effective, predictable and consistent effort to meet these critical needs for specially impacted victims in the disability and special needs populations. The Agency will explore alternative initiatives to improve coordination and support this critical effort in the near term.

I have tasked the Disaster Assistance Directorate to coordinate with the Disability Coordinator to engage our ESF-6 partners in collaborative discussion to develop proposed strategies. Several approaches will be considered to address the gap during the pendency of budget action on the NAC's recommendation. The approach that best serves FEMA's commitment to special needs and disability populations will have elements taken from several proposed strategies. It is critical that the NAC continues to be involved in this discussion to help ensure a seamless transition from effective interim initiatives to the integration of the region disability coordinators into the Agency's

Dr. G. Kemble Bennett

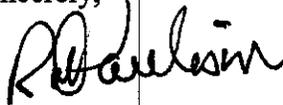
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mission in support of special needs populations and persons with disabilities. While we expect this collaboration will keep you informed, nevertheless, FEMA will fully brief the NAC on the interim strategies, and eventual decision on region disability coordinators through quarterly status updates to the NAC and the Special Needs Subcommittee.

FEMA greatly appreciates the Council's outstanding commitment and service to FEMA's mission. I believe that the NAC will of great value to the Agency during the upcoming transition and for years to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "R. David Paulison".

R. David Paulison  
Administrator