



FEMA

March 9, 2018

MEMORANDUM FOR: James Featherstone
Chairman, National Advisory Council

FROM: Brock Long
Administrator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Brock Long", written over the printed name of the Administrator.

SUBJECT: **Response to Recommendations from the November 2017 National Advisory Council Meeting**

Thank you for your December 27, 2017, memorandum regarding the National Advisory Council (NAC) recommendations from its November 28-30, 2017, meeting in Washington, DC. I have reviewed the recommendations with my staff and directed them to incorporate your advice and input as we move forward with priority initiatives to build a culture of preparedness, ready the nation for catastrophic disasters, and reduce the complexity of FEMA.

Provision of Medical Countermeasures

I know that issues related to the provision of medical countermeasures are an ongoing concern of the NAC and that staff from the Office of Response and Recovery and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) have consulted with the NAC Protection and Preparedness subcommittee on a number of occasions to discuss these issues.

HHS is the lead federal agency to support impacted state and local communities, and our close collaboration can ensure a seamless response to a biological threat or emerging infectious disease. With this in mind, I will direct Regional Administrators to ensure that our concepts of operations for biological incidents align with state and local operational timelines and support Cities Readiness Initiative plans. Similarly, if information is not already available to determine the levels of federal agency medical countermeasure stockpiles, we will support HHS in developing and conducting a survey to assist state and local officials in understanding gaps in their jurisdictions.

Also in coordination with HHS, we continue significant work with national Federal Executive Boards to explore the use of large, federal Closed Points of Dispensing in metropolitan areas. This concept depends on the availability of federal surge personnel to assist with dispensing, and last year the Office of Personnel Management began a five-city pilot project to address this issue. We support this concept and the cities participating in the pilot program. Efforts like this are vital to readying the nation for catastrophic events.

Duplication of Benefits in the Individual Assistance Program

I agree with you that FEMA employees must have clarity in the processes and resources they deal with and that we must simplify and streamline our programs and policies. One of my goals is to make navigating FEMA's programs as clear and easy as possible. This requires that our programs are understandable and that they work in concert with other crucial service providers, including non-

profit organizations, like those that are members of the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters, to help communities and individuals rebound from disasters. Only through a unity of effort can we serve the needs of disaster survivors.

Regarding potential duplication of benefits, statute and regulation require that FEMA's assistance for individuals and households does not duplicate assistance from insurance or other sources, including monetary or in-kind contributions from voluntary or charitable organizations.¹ We try to prevent such duplication through our sequence of delivery, in which volunteer agencies generally provide initial emergency assistance, and then potentially additional assistance to cover unmet needs following the provision of federal assistance.² If an agency or organization disrupts the sequence of delivery, or an individual does not disclose information about assistance they received, it may result in a duplication of benefits.

It is a not perfect system, and we do not always communicate it well. I have directed my staff to find innovative, responsible ways to simplify our programs and policies, and communicate them with more transparency and clarity. Ultimately, we want individuals to receive the assistance they need, and we must follow the law. We must also ensure that in delivering assistance we do not delay recovery or discourage others from providing emergency assistance and meeting unmet needs.

Understanding Tribal Nations and Improving Tribal Relations

FEMA's ability to support America's disaster survivors, citizens, first responders, and communities relies on our relationships with federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial governments, as well as non-governmental organizations and the private sector. We must approach these relationships with understanding, trust, and respect. I appreciate your recommendation and discussions of ways in which we can improve our nation-to-nation relationship with tribal communities and provide employees with a better understanding of sovereign tribal nations. Because of your recommendation, all FEMA personnel are now required to take the Independent Study Course, *Building Partnerships with Tribal Governments*. In addition, our National Tribal Affairs Advisor Milo Booth is working with program leadership to educate FEMA staff on tribal cultural norms and best practices for creating an effective tribal relationship.

Your recommendation also encouraged me to revisit previous recommendations and look for ways to better our relationships with and service to the whole community. All FEMA employees are now also required to take the Independent Study Course, *Including People with Disabilities and Others with Access and Functional Needs in Disaster Operations*. Each of these courses has been loaded into the FEMA Employee Knowledge Center and added to our matrix of mandatory training requirements. We are also reminding our managers of their responsibility to actively monitor progress and ensure that all of their employees complete mandatory training requirements.

I appreciate the valuable insights of the NAC and look forward to our work together to build a better FEMA and a more resilient nation. I expect the NAC to be an essential partner in this effort and to continue providing advice and counsel in support of our goals to build a culture of preparedness, ready the nation for catastrophic disasters, and reduce the complexity of FEMA.

¹ See 42 U.S.C. 5155(a) and 42 U.S.C. 5174(a)(1) (in Sections 312 and 408 of the Stafford Act), and definition of assistance from other means at 44 C.F.R. 206.111.

² See 44 C.F.R. 206.191(d)(2) for details on the sequence of delivery.