

**Testimony of Mary Beth Michos  
Chief of Fire and Rescue  
Prince William County, Virginia**

**U.S. House of Representatives  
Government Reform Committee  
Honorable Thomas M. Davis, III (11<sup>th</sup>-VA), Chairman  
Thursday, June 24, 2004**

Mr. Chairman, Vice Chairs and Members of the House Government Reform Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify before the Committee. My name is Mary Beth Michos and I am the Chief of Fire and Rescue for Prince William County, Virginia. I am here today to provide testimony on Prince William County's experience with Emergency Preparedness Coordination matters in the National Capital Region, with an emphasis on grant management and coordination.

Prince William County is a rapidly growing suburban community located approximately 30 miles south of Washington D.C. Our community is home to the United States Marine Corp base at Quantico and two national parks: Prince William Forest Park and Manassas National Battlefield. Our population is currently estimated at approximately 330,000, which includes the four towns of Occoquan, Dumfries, Haymarket and Quantico. The population count does not include those of the independent Cities of Manassas and Manassas Park, which are currently estimated at 37,000 and 11,000, respectively. At the time the U.S. Census was taken in 2000, our population was enumerated at 280,813.

The rapid growth of our community has challenged us to not only keep up with growth related matters such as the appropriate provision of police and fire and rescue services, but in addressing the emerging issue of keeping our community safe in the event of terrorism. As you are aware, the costs associated with strengthening our ability to respond to such events are high. For this reason, we are grateful that the U.S. Congress has allocated Homeland Security funds for states and local jurisdictions, and recognized the vulnerability of the National Capital Area to terrorism and established

the Office for National Capital Regional Coordination (ONCRC) inside the Department of Homeland Security.

Over the past two and a half years, Prince William County has been the recipient of approximately \$5.3 million in federal funds for emergency preparedness with an additional \$905,930 grant that my staff is processing for submission by tomorrow's deadline. The first \$4.3 million for the County was a direct earmark in a supplemental appropriations bill passed shortly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. These funds were expended on equipment and training to strengthen our ability to be the "First Responder" in the event of a weapons of mass destruction incident.

Additional resources are being allocated to Prince William County through the Urban Area Security Initiative administered by the Department of Homeland Security. Requests for these resources were developed by the governors of Virginia and Maryland and the Mayor of the District of Columbia. There is now local government involvement into the allocation of National Capital Region Urban Area Security Initiative funds. Involvement of Chief Administrative Officers has allowed for the range of emergency service functions within the region to collaborate to identify regional solutions that are beyond the scope of what each of the jurisdictions can do effectively individually.

We appreciate all of the resources that the Congress has provided local government first responders. However, it is important for you to know that performing the processes to assess our capabilities, identify our vulnerabilities, and develop plans and needs assessments for our homeland security preparedness is both highly staff and time intensive. The effort to conduct this work in my department took over a year. And despite that intense work and the high quality of the strategy that resulted we still find that the requirements of the grants typically require much additional work to be completed in an insufficient time frame.

It may appear that the timetables that the federal and state governments place on grant deadlines are sufficient for local governments. However, by the time these grants process through the federal agency then through the state agency the local government may only have a few weeks to do our work to submit for the grant. During these few weeks we must

coordinate with most of the agencies of County government, agencies that are funded by both state and local governments, the four incorporated towns, volunteer agencies such as our volunteer fire and rescue companies, assess our fiscal ability to manage the ongoing operating and replacement costs to sustain the initiatives and obtain authorization from our Board of County Supervisors to apply for the grant.

While we have developed a priority list of needs to guide us in developing our requests, the workload associated with these requests has increased as our staff is required to attend numerous planning and coordination meetings locally, regionally and within our state. Just to give you an example my meeting schedule alone has more than doubled in the past 18 months due to having to attend these meetings and I am just one of many on my staff who have these types of meetings to attend. Recognizing the increased workload and short turnaround times, we hired an Emergency Services Coordinator and an assistant to direct these processes within our own County and to liaison with regional, state and Federal agencies. We are fortunate that Prince William County has the resources to staff these positions as this funding is not available from the federal or state governments.

As far as gaps in emergency preparedness in the National Capital we feel that at the state and federal levels we don't have the same degree of coordination and cooperation as we do at the local and regional levels. This sometimes hinders our local and regional efforts.

A serious obstruction exists to effective mutual aid assistance between Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia. Congress must act to address liability and indemnification issues which arise when emergency aid is provided across boundaries. The need for legislation for homeland security has been specifically addressed by the Governors of Maryland, Virginia and the Mayor in their "eight commitments to action" with DHS Secretary Ridge.

While we are also very appreciative of the effort made by the ONCRC of the Department of Homeland Security, there is still a lot of work to do. We can't lose sight that while we have to address the growing homeland security concerns our staffs still have their everyday workloads. Whatever

the federal government has local jurisdictions do with regard to vulnerability assessments, grant applications, reimbursement requests or other bureaucratic processes it ought to be done to fill a clear need and with our input to make sure whatever it is it will be beneficial. We don't mind doing the work if we know it will improve the situation. Prince William County participated in the required vulnerability assessment that took away 10 staff from their normal duties for approximately two weeks. This effort gave little value back to the County. And although we understand that our FY 04 and FY 05 Homeland Security grants will be evaluated against the assessment results I am able to articulate our vulnerabilities with much less effort and with a higher degree of confidence when compared to that assessment process and its results.

In summary, Prince William County is in a much stronger position to respond to any man made event, such as a chemical or biological attack, than before 9/11. There is also better coordination and cooperation at the local and regional levels. However, the coordination and cooperation is probably not evident to the street level provider who is the "First Responder" in most, if not all events. Our predominant focus has been to keep pace with the requirements of the grants as well as to make certain we're doing the right thing to be as prepared as we possibly can. Our senior officers and administrative staffs have justifiably been inundated with homeland security related duties. I believe it is essential for all levels of governments to find new and better ways to work with each other so that we can optimize the limited time and staff we have to get the best results. I'll be satisfied when we reach a point when all of our firefighters and EMTs express their confidence that they feel prepared to respond to any WMD contingency.

In closing, thank you for affording me this opportunity to testify and I would be glad to stand for questions.