

**National Commission on Children and Disasters**  
**Report of the Subcommittee on Education, Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice**  
**Aerospace Building, TRC Room**  
**Washington, D.C.**  
**June 24, 2009**

*The Education and Juvenile Justice Subcommittee will review issues affecting children and disasters in the areas of emergency preparedness, response and recovery in schools, child care facilities in schools, systems of juvenile justice, child welfare, and juvenile and family courts. Areas of focus will include coordination with state and local planning efforts, identification of key services, training of personnel, and communication among all stakeholders.*

The subcommittee opened the discussion by reviewing the Statement of Purpose, which was revised to include juvenile and family courts within its stated scope. The cross-cutting theme of the subcommittee's discussion was the notion that systems of education, child welfare and juvenile justice must all have comprehensive multi-hazard disaster plans in place that address all four phases of emergency management planning and that are created and implemented in collaboration with a variety of governmental and community stakeholders, including emergency managers. Issues of training and mental health also cut universally through the spectrum of topics and issues examined by the subcommittee.

The subcommittee decided to curb all issues pertaining to funding for later discussion. While many of the recommendations discussed by the subcommittee would undoubtedly be implemented more easily and meaningfully with ties to existing or additional funding sources, it was noted that it is essential for much of the recommended planning to occur regardless of whether funding is allocated. Often times after debate, the subcommittee chose to leave issues regarding action steps needed for implementation of recommendations and funding streams for resolution at a later discussion.

School emergency planning was discussed at length by the subcommittee. After much deliberation, the subcommittee came to the consensus conclusion that state department of educations should ensure that school districts develop, implement and communicate multi-hazard school emergency management plans in collaboration with public private and/or parochial schools, and an array of other partners including , local government, local public health, law enforcement, local emergency managers, first responders, hospitals, healthcare providers, child welfare systems, mental health agencies, education agencies, parents/caregivers, children, and community stakeholders. The subcommittee discussed at length the best way to ensure that private and parochial schools would be included in planning and would develop their own plans, and decided that involving state education departments would best accomplish this. In addition, the subcommittee recommended encouraging joint training of teachers, school personnel and the aforementioned stakeholders in order to ensure successful implementation of plans.

The need for schools' disaster plans to align with state and local emergency management plans was discussed. It was noted that an additional linkage would be to enlist the support of said agencies in evaluating the quality of the schools' plans, or to conduct a

joint or community-wide assessment. The subcommittee concluded that the Department of Education should guide States in developing measures and metrics to evaluate and assess disaster planning in schools.

As for mental health needs in schools, it was noted that research indicates that most children who need mental health services will not get it outside of schools. The subcommittee identified the need for both pre-service and in-service training for teachers and school administrators in the areas of crisis, loss and trauma. This could be accomplished pre-service by inserting such training in the curricula of post-secondary schools of education for teachers and school administrators, and post-service by adding such training as a professional development requirement for re-certification. In addition, the subcommittee agreed to recommend to require that state disaster mental health plans incorporate school-based services. In addition, the subcommittee agreed that the FEMA crisis counseling program should be used to support mental health training for school staff so that crisis counseling can be delivered in schools immediately after a disaster.

Child welfare systems were discussed and the subcommittee recommended that child welfare systems engage in a similar coordinated and comprehensive planning process to that which was recommended for school districts. Plans should take into account all four phases of emergency management and be integrated with community and state-wide emergency operations plans. It was noted that State child welfare programs are often a “disaster” themselves before a disaster ever strikes as they often have poor records systems and case management that causes them to lose track of children. It was noted that the Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2006 requires that State child welfare disaster plans have procedures to continue services to children and families affected by a disaster; respond to new child welfare cases; remain in communication with caseworkers and personnel; preserve essential program records; and coordinate services and share information with other States. However, it was noted that the review process of these plans is insufficient to ensure that these plans are themselves sufficient and will actually succeed upon implementation. The need for pre-established cross-jurisdictional agreements between State agencies regarding access to accurate, integrated data on foster children and foster families for use during emergencies/disasters was noted, particularly for interstate relocations.

Finally, the subcommittee focused on issues surrounding juvenile justice. It was mentioned that Senator Leahy is currently pushing pending legislation to reauthorize the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, which would provide an opportunity for the Commission to push for a state juvenile justice agency disaster planning amendment. The amendment would require juvenile justice planning like the planning requirement legislated in the Family Services Improvement Act, which tied the State child welfare planning requirement to funding. It was noted that this recommendation and its corresponding action steps for implementation would have to be fast-tracked by the Commission because Senator Leahy is ready to move on the reauthorization. It was agreed that juvenile justice emergency management plans should follow a consistent four phase planning structure recommended for school and child welfare plans. Also

expressed was the need to include mental health training as a critical component of juvenile justice/correction agencies' planning. Although mental health professionals are in correction facilities, their expertise in bereavement and disaster-specific loss likely would be limited, and corrections staff nonetheless need disaster-specific training. The need for disaster planning for juvenile and family court systems was also discussed and recommended as was the need to ensure that licensed private residential treatment facilities have multi-hazard disaster plans in place.

Homeless children were also a topic of discussion. The best way to coordinate services for said children and to ensure that they are included in planning was debated. Under federal law, any child who is displaced or in transitional housing due to a disaster is considered homeless and has certain rights including the right to an education and other concessions to facilitate their education. Schools are the chief resource for keeping track of homeless children but it was mentioned that schools often do this deficiently even though federal law – the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act - requires schools to take this role. It was noted that the Commission should further investigate how the needs of homeless children can be better met following a disaster.

Finally, there was discussion regarding the need for a central clearinghouse of resources and information to provide consistent, unified and easily understood information to victims of mass disasters in a timely manner. No such resource was available following 9/11 making it more difficult for families who were victims of the attack to put their lives back together.