

METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON  COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

One Region Moving Forward

May 5, 2011

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*Adjunct Member

Hon. Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

I am writing on behalf of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) Chief Administrative Officers Committee (CAOs) to reiterate COG's firm position in support of a strong, locally-led National Capital Region – National Medical Response Team (NCR-NMRT).

The NCR-NMRT was first established in 1995 and is staffed with EMS, hazmat and law enforcement personnel representing area local governments. The team has been managed by Arlington County on behalf of the NCR and deployed for National Special Security Events in the National Capital Region. The team also responded and played a critical role at the Pentagon on September 11, 2001.

Despite objections from area first-responders and public officials in the National Capital Region, in 2010 HHS decided it would open this vital service to bidding by the private sector. Unlike the successful cooperative agreement between the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and local governments in support of the internationally recognized Urban Search and Rescue Teams, HHS now concludes that the NCR-NMRT requires a competitive contract.

Not surprisingly, no private sector entity could replicate the regional assets and years of experience assembled by the Arlington County-led NCR-NMRT. Unfortunately, the NCR-NMRT has been unable to negotiate an ongoing agreement with HHS. The Request for Proposal advertised by HHS-ASPER did little to reflect the nature of the NMRT's capabilities or the needs of the region. As a result, Arlington County has with great reluctance and the full support of its regional partners allowed the existing agreement with HHS-ASPER to expire.

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This situation is of grave concern to public officials and first-responders in the National Capital Region. The NCR-NMRT is a unique federal-regional asset established with the purpose of supporting the region for mass casualty incidents and to support National Special Security Events, which occur with great frequency in the District of Columbia and elsewhere in the region. The team has been deployed for every Presidential Inauguration and State of the Union Address since 1996. For the first time in 15 years, the National Capital Region lacks this response capacity. This is a critical gap in our region's readiness that must be filled quickly.

The CAOs Committee is comprised of city and county managers from COG's 21 member local governments in the National Capital Region. Collectively we have made great progress, in partnership with HHS, DHS and other federal agencies, to strengthen emergency preparedness and response following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The loss of the NCR-NMRT is inconsistent with federal policy that identifies the need for effective partnerships between the three levels of government.

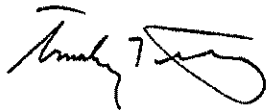
Last year, concerned that the NCR-NMRT was in jeopardy, the COG Board of Directors urged that HHS execute a cooperative agreement with the NCR-NMRT, similar to the model successfully employed for the DHS-supported Urban Search and Rescue Teams.

When advised by first-responders last month of the lack of progress in remedying this situation, the Chief Administrative Officers Committee voted to bring this matter to your personal attention and to request your support for reinstatement of a HHS and NCR-NMRT under a cooperative agreement similar to that between DHS-FEMA and the Urban Search and Rescue teams.

COG and its public officials and first-responders stand ready to assist you in restoring this vital emergency response capacity.

Please contact David Robertson at 202-962-3260 or [drobertson@mw cog.org](mailto:d Robertson@mw cog.org) if you have questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,



Timothy L. Firestine
Chief Administrative Officer, Montgomery County, MD
Chairman, COG Chief Administrative Officers Committee

Cc: National Capital Region Congressional Delegation
COG Board of Directors