

The Honorable Barbara A. Mikulski
Senate Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: Ebola Hearing - Outside Witness Testimony

Dear Honorable Chairwoman Mikulski,

Your focus on the concern of Ebola is greatly appreciated from the local level. Within the St. Louis Urban Area, many efforts from several agencies are working to prepare for Ebola and other significant viral diseases. Public health and hospitals are on the forefront of this effort, but the impact is far reaching and requires an entire community approach.

Preparedness efforts for events, similar to Ebola, have been in effect for over a decade utilizing funds and guidance provided by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) grant program and the U.S. Department of Health and Senior Services, Assistant Secretary of Preparedness and Response (ASPR) grant program. In the St. Louis area, the agency designated to manage the activities of these two programs is the St. Louis Area Regional Response System locally known as STARRS. The approach taken in St. Louis has been to develop working committees that coordinate efforts to prepare for terrorism and other threats and hazards, based on local needs and federal guidance – Ebola Virus Disease fits into that description.

Success of people and programs coming together are currently being seen as the region is holding a discussion based exercise concerning Ebola as this is being sent to you. When the exercise was announced last Friday afternoon, the capacity of 100 participants was exceeded in less than 24 hours! The goal of the exercise includes discussion on the detailed components of personal protection and interviewing possibly infected individuals. However, the overarching goal is to focus on the broader scope of common practices and expectations across a broad spectrum of agencies and disciplines throughout the eight county St. Louis Metropolitan Region.

Concerns already identified through the exercise design process include:

1. Do agencies have the correct personal protective equipment (PPE) and is there enough?
2. Agencies who are attempting to get more PPE are finding it is considerably backordered.
3. Varying state laws have significant impacts when managing or communicating a regional issue.
4. Despite plans and agreements, implementation gaps are substantial.
5. Information from the federal level to the front line worker is slow, and in some cases, unclear.

6. Guidance from the federal and state levels are expected, however, implementation methods should be left to local or regional collaboration.

Through our exercise efforts, we hope to narrow the aforementioned gaps. In a region with excellent health care facilities and strong UASI and ASPR programs, we still feel vulnerable to Ebola or the next potential infectious disease event.

Please understand that equipment and training are needed, but not in a reactive mindset. Resources should be available quickly, and general healthcare facilities staff need to feel confident relying on those resources being available when needed. STARRS and the St. Louis region have attempted to develop (with many successes) local caches for those quick deployment needs. Federal resources are then needed to sustain, or backfill when necessary, the local preparedness efforts.

As much as the region has tried, it cannot prepare for every possible threat or hazard. Bringing public, private, and non-government organizations together to coordinate disparate protocols and laws, in order to achieve the common goal of national preparedness and homeland security takes time and effort. Unfortunately, time is not always available. Your help in securing the right resources at the right time is greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your time and diligent efforts in combatting Ebola Virus Disease across the globe.

Sincerely,



Nick Gragnani

Director, St. Louis Area Regional Response System

East-West Gateway Council of Governments