



LEGISLATIVE FACT SHEET

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS

A REGIONAL APPROACH TO HOMELAND SECURITY: PROMOTING LOCAL PARTNERSHIP, EFFICIENCY & PREPAREDNESS

ISSUE:

The members of NADO strongly encourage Congress and the administration to endorse a sub-state regional approach to coordinating, implementing and planning our nation's first responder and homeland security preparedness programs. While federal officials recognized the importance of intergovernmental partnerships and agency coordination with the creation of the new US Department of Homeland Security, there has been a lack of focus and attention on the pressing need for improved partnerships, planning and collaborations at the sub-state regional level. At a time when there are limited amounts of financial and human resources available at the federal, state and local levels, it is essential that communities have incentives and a framework to leverage, coordinate and pool resources.

Any first responder legislation adopted by the House and Senate during the 109th Congress should place an emphasis on regional planning, implementation and coordination at the sub-state and local levels. In addition, legislation should require that state and local governments use the existing network of regional councils of government and regional development organizations to assist in the development and maintenance of overall homeland security and emergency response plans.

RATIONALE FOR A REGIONAL APPROACH:

The national network of 500 regional councils of governments and regional development organizations is an experienced and cost-efficient mechanism that should be utilized in facilitating and coordinating homeland security and emergency management planning activities within a region and state. These entities are fully equipped to help evaluate and prioritize equipment needs and assessments, coordinate the integration of first responder communication systems, and above all, promote multi-jurisdictional cooperation and strategic planning.

For decades, regional councils of governments have been instrumental in bringing local elected officials, business leaders and community stakeholders together to address critical issues on a regional basis. These efforts have traditionally focused on coordinating and integrating local economic development, transportation and land use planning activities. In recent years, the portfolio has been expanded in some states to include all-hazard mitigation planning, workforce development, aging services and the enhancement of local data through advanced Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

Based on their strong record of strengthening intergovernmental partnerships, Congress should require that state and local governments use regional councils to assist in the development and coordination of overall homeland security and emergency response plans.

- According to a survey conducted by the National League of Cities, less than 40 percent of cities with a population of 10,000 or less have a terrorism plan in place. Many individual local jurisdictions, especially small metropolitan and rural communities, lack the manpower, expertise and resources available to develop a comprehensive emergency response plan.

- While often overlooked, many small town and rural locations are the home of critical infrastructure and potentially vulnerable targets, including dams, power substations and refineries, bridges and reservoirs.
- The number of local governments across the nation that encompass rural cities and counties cannot be overlooked. According to US Census Bureau data, 72 percent (or 2,178) of the nation's 3,034 counties have populations below 50,000 while only 856 counties have populations above 50,000. Of the 35,933 municipal and township governments across the nation, 98 percent (or 35,195) have populations below 50,000 while only 738 encompass areas above 50,000 residents.
- These smaller communities, taken individually, typically lack the manpower and expertise to effectively implement comprehensive response plans and programs. By working regionally, they can overcome this reality. A regional approach establishes economies of scale by pooling limited resources, leveraging the technical capabilities of regional councils, and, more importantly, tapping into the ability of regional councils to facilitate the strategic cooperation of individual local jurisdictions.
- The majority of local governments have made only modest or no changes to emergency response plans since September 2001. Most recently, nearly half of NADO members participating in a live e-forum indicated their regions have not increased their levels of homeland security coordination and preparedness in the past four years. The most common obstacles to achieving change include political and turf battles; lack of training, equipment and technology; and limited assistance for planning. As regional planning organizations, regional councils have the professional staff, planning tools and background required to address and overcome these obstacles.
- A September 2004 report released by the Government Accountability Office found that effective regional coordination can enhance emergency preparedness and that hazard mitigation plans developed by regional organizations can be an effective tool to focus resources and efforts to address problems on a regional level. (GAO-04-1009)
- A sub-state regional approach is a sound and common-sense solution to addressing local preparedness and planning needs. As proven by the model developed by the governor of Texas, regional councils provide an environment that is less parochial, biased and political – and therefore capable of analyzing regional threats and needs on the merits and facts alone. This is more efficient and cost-effective than establishing new regional partnerships or allowing local jurisdictions to plan and act individually.
- Local plans developed in isolation are counterproductive and fail to address the full threats to a region. In a time of scarce federal resources, regional councils are uniquely positioned to gather, warehouse and update the information needed for local officials to make informed and timely decisions about the distribution and use of their homeland security dollars.

ACTION NEEDED:

Encourage Congress to adopt first responder legislation that contains language which requires state and local governments to use the existing network of regional councils of government to assist in the development and coordination of overall homeland security and emergency response plans.

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