

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



FY25 Performance Oversight Hearing

Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency

Testimony of
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Before the
Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety
Council of the District of Columbia
The Honorable Brooke Pinto, Chairman

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Chairperson Pinto, members, and staff of the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety, I'm Clint Osborn, Director of the District of Columbia's Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency – also known as HSEMA. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on HSEMA's performance in FY25 and FY26 to date. I'm joined today by HSEMA's Chief Administrative Officer Adriane Gill, Deputy Director Justin Brown, and our Agency Fiscal Officer from The Office of the Chief Financial Officer, John Nitz.

I'd like to recognize and thank as well the entire HSEMA team for their hard work and dedication over the past year. This has been a challenging year, with multiple activations including numerous unplanned incidents in addition to major planned events.

My testimony today will focus on multiple components of HSEMA's public-facing role and share how our planning and forward-learning work are improving the District's preparedness. As the nature of threats, hazards, and incident response has changed over time, HSEMA has continuously evolved to meet the needs of District residents and visitors. We have continued to work to maintain and strengthen our role and reputation as a national leader in homeland security and emergency management.

We began Fiscal Year 2025 with planning for a safe and orderly presidential election and then worked with the incoming administration on their inaugural plans. January of 2025 brought a snowstorm, the state funeral of President Carter, the January 6 counting of Electoral Votes, and Inauguration Day. The intricate plans for Inauguration were upended days before by extreme cold temperatures, and our team worked closely with partner agencies to minimize disruption to downtown residents when the main events moved to Capital One Arena. Finally, January concluded with the tragic midair collision of American Airlines flight 5342 with a U.S. Army helicopter.

In total, our Emergency Operations Center (EOC) was activated for 75% of January 2025. 2025 continued with numerous other activations and events, including the World Pride Festival and the Army 250th celebration. Our team also managed multiple extreme heat events and supported our utility partners with their outages.

2025 was also a year of sharing our work and our city. In the Spring, during the annual conference in upper northwest, the National Association of Fusion Centers named DC's the Fusion Center of the Year – the first time for DC. We were also proud to serve as the host city for the National Homeland Security Conference in August, the largest annual gathering of homeland security professionals in the nation. Many members of our staff presented on their work to more than 2,000 peers across the country. As part of that conference, we conducted a three-day interoperable communications exercise and partnered with over a dozen private, federal, and DC agency partners on infrastructure and security tours to show how the District works together to create a safe and more resilient community.

In December, HSEMA hosted the 2025 Interoperability Summit, which brought together hundreds of state and national emergency management and public safety leaders to examine the history and importance of interoperable communications to our work. In particular, the 2025 Summit commemorated the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing and brought in leaders and experts involved in the response to that incident to help improve our own processes here in the District. I'm proud of the work that our team does and I'm proud that they share their knowledge, skills, and abilities so freely.

Looking forward, we anticipate this coming year will be particularly busy as well with planned events, as our country commemorates 250 years since our country's founding. In addition to the 4th of July celebrations, we expect a major UFC fight, IndyCar race, and more that will bring large crowds while impacting commute and emergency routes. We are already working closely with our federal and local partners to ensure that these events are planned and executed in a safe and coordinated manner. As our partners finalize their plans, we expect to provide further briefings to the public as we've done for other previous major events.

And of course, we've been busy these past few weeks with a historic snow and ice storm that blanketed our region in "snowcrete." This incident demonstrates how the District trains year-round, the important changes we've been making to our systems, and how we seek to continually improve our processes and plans.

As I testify today, the State of Emergency Mayor Bowser declared ahead of the storm has only just expired, and HSEMA staff continue to coordinate with District agencies and other partners to continue the recovery work. Our EOC was active for 50% of January, while our staff worked to address other steady state priorities and future planning for other events.

Last month's storm was unique because of two major factors: first, the amount of moisture was similar to other large storms in 2010 and 2016, but it fell as a combination of snow subsequently covered by a thick layer of far denser sleet and ice. Second, air temperatures stayed far below the temperatures at which the sun could help clear our roads and sidewalks. This meant the typical snow plowing operations were not tenable; the snow and ice removal is more similar to a debris removal mission that is needed after a hurricane.

HSEMA's role in this incident is an example of the role our agency has in facilitating the missions and services provided by our partners. In our Incident Support Model (ISM) system, each agency is responsible for providing certain missions and services, and our agency helps with coordination and resource requests for unmet needs. We also provide a common operating environment for situational awareness through maintaining the physical EOC as well as virtual and communications tools.

For this storm, our Situational Awareness Bureau was the first part of our agency to track this storm, as they work regularly with the National Weather Service (NWS) to monitor all types of weather hazards for their impact on government operations and the public. Notably, NWS has begun assigning a liaison to our Fusion Center each Wednesday, which proved to be of tremendous value in this event. By the time snow started to fall on the evening of Saturday, January 24, the EOC had been activated for several days to establish the steady rhythm of coordination calls, weather updates, and to alert the public of the incoming weather. We collected resource requests from our partner agencies for contracts and equipment that went beyond the typical needs of the Department of Public Works (DPW), District Department of Transportation (DDOT), and other agencies.

The on-call EOC team worked diligently throughout the week to prepare the District for the storm, prepared themselves and their families on Saturday, and transitioned to an in-person posture beginning the morning of the storm. Some of them would not make it home again until Tuesday. We activated the District's Joint Information Center (JIC) as part of the EOC to coordinate messaging amongst the several dozen agencies who would have a role in snow removal, human services operations, or otherwise provide essential city services. The JIC began full in-person operations on Sunday and coordinated more than 160 media interviews to keep the public informed of the storm and response. Staff worked 12-15 hour days, beginning Saturday night, to enable long shifts with a minimum of logistical and safety issues. I am incredibly grateful to our staff and partners who left their homes and families for days at a time to work tirelessly on this activation.

Throughout the storm, and aftermath, we worked closely with other agency partners and the private sector to ensure the safety of District residents and visitors. For example, we worked with several Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) to help create safe pathways to WMATA warming buses for unhoused individuals; the BIDs in turn helped collect real-time information on gaps in snow removal to help Snow Team agencies optimize their operations. Meanwhile, our resource unit scoured the region for the metal tools needed to remove ice when it was clear standard snow shovels wouldn't work, while other members of our team collaborated on technology and logistics to enable press conferences to keep the public informed. I'm especially proud of our resource unit, which anticipated the needs of agencies well before the storm started and processed dozens of requests for equipment and services in collaboration with the Office of Contracting and Procurement (OCP). The team even provided a just-in-time training on the resource request process for agencies days before the storm to ensure accuracy and efficiency in this process.

In this past year, we have also enhanced our capabilities for forward planning by expanding our Geographic Information System team and integrating new and emerging data sources. This has assisted with multiple recent activations. For example, during the January storm our team brought together data on plowing operations, aerial surveys, and frequent check-ins with the business community on field conditions. These methods maintained the common operating picture necessary for District leaders to make proactive decisions, helped with our agency partners' operations, and enabled contingency planning on potential secondary impacts such as outages or

flooding as the ice melted. We continue to test new methods of data collection and analysis that will anticipate future needs and improve our response to incidents.

Another initiative I'd like to highlight is the improvements we've made to our extreme weather alerting procedures. During this past fiscal year, HSEMA collaborated with the Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH) to improve messaging around heat and cold alerts to the public and other agencies. This included aligning our reporting thresholds with the NWS, and revamping procedures to streamline the process of determining these alerts. This ensures that vulnerable populations are protected during extreme weather events and that city services are appropriately adjusted to keep workers and residents safe.

Our AlertDC platform eclipsed 100,000 subscribers in FY 25, and this remains an essential way for us to communicate critical information to the public about severe weather, outages, transportation incidents, and more. I'd like to take this opportunity to ask all residents and workers in the District to sign up at alertdc.dc.gov.

For any event, planned or unplanned, we also rely on training and plans previously produced and continuously refined so that we remain ready to assist our partners. For special events, we begin planning months or more in advance, with the entire process from inception to completion involving nearly every member of our staff at some point, from initial planning up to the EOC activation itself. Of course, even with a planned event, weather or other conditions can require changes in the event or our posture which we try to anticipate as well through setting up resources for emergency evacuation or other protocols.

Our Office of Special Events is an essential first step for planning individual events. This team manages the Mayor's Special Events Task Force (MSETG), which convenes all the various agencies who issue permits, but they also guide organizers for other events that are not required to go through the MSETG process. One aspect of their coordination role is to ensure that each agency's requirements do not conflict with one another, which would slow approvals and potentially lead to safety gaps. The strong role for HSEMA in this process also allows other areas of our agency to be involved early in the process in future planning, communications, threat

analysis, day-of support for operations and community alerting on our mobile command bus, and other essential roles.

For many federal-led events like those associated with America 250, the White House, and the National Park Service (NPS) are not subject to the District's permitting requirements and MSETG process. But it's in the best interests of all involved that they engage in a similar way, and the strong relationships our team has built has led to federal entities leveraging HSEMA and our Office of Special Events to provide safe and coordinated events. I cannot emphasize enough how central our Office of Special Events is to ensuring safe and secure events throughout the District and their constant and consistent efforts make DC a place that people want to host and attend events.

The role of District agencies before and during a major event is often hidden from public view as it involves the sorts of contingency planning that minimize impact on government services and ensures the availability of surge services in an emergency. This includes pre-planned detour routes for fire trucks; pre-positioned emergency shelters if there's an incident at an event; tour bus operations; and more. During an event or incident, our agency staffs command posts and the EOC to minimize and manage the consequences of any disruption to these plans.

While much of this work is done behind the scenes, one aspect that is very visible to the public are road closures, in particular, which streets are closed and what equipment is used to maintain a safe perimeter. Along with the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), I testified in front of your committee just a few months ago about the various types of barriers used to safely close a street to traffic. In December, City Administrator Donahue issued an order to establish the City Administrator's Task Force on Vehicular Terrorism Prevention, and the group is meeting regularly. We look forward to sharing more about the initial findings and recommendations soon.

In addition to cultural and celebratory events, this year also marks a local election year for the District. We will continue to coordinate with our local government partners in the lead up to the primary and general elections, and afterwards as we plan for leadership transitions. Continuity of government operations is a key emergency management role, and transitions are unfortunately

when we are most vulnerable. Our team will be ready to brief new leadership on the systems and processes that allow the District to protect our community before, during, and after a disaster.

Finally, I'd like to acknowledge the concern about potential funding impacts from federal changes in the grant programs that are the Agency's primary funding source. As of now, our planning and operations have not been significantly impacted, but we have reduced our contract staff support and have become more strategic with our hiring and other spending. There have also been impacts on essential mitigation projects, as detailed in the pre-hearing responses. We look forward to speaking more about this issue, as necessary, during the upcoming FY27 budget process.

In closing, I am grateful for the amazing HSEMA team and their dedication to our mission of ensuring the safety of our residents, businesses, and visitors during all conditions. I also thank Mayor Muriel Bowser for her leadership, City Administrator Kevin Donahue, and Deputy Mayor Lindsey Appiah for their expertise and guidance. I appreciate the opportunity to serve the District and thank you for allowing me to testify today. This concludes my testimony and I'm available to answer questions.