

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency



Fiscal Year 2023 Performance Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
Clint Osborn
Interim Director

Before the
Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety Council of the
District of Columbia

The Honorable Brooke Pinto, Chairperson

John A. Wilson Building
Room D
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Chairperson Pinto, members, and staff of the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety, thank you for inviting me to testify today. My name is Clint Osborn, and I am the Interim Director of the District of Columbia’s Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency – also known as HSEMA.

I appreciate the opportunity to come before you today to provide testimony on HSEMA’s performance in FY23 and FY24 to date. We have also provided written answers to pre-hearing questions.

I am joined at the table today by HSEMA’s Chief Administrative Officer Adriane Gill, and Agency Fiscal Officer from the Office of the Chief Financial Officer, John Nitz. I’d also like to acknowledge HSEMA’s Senior Leadership Team, who are with us today. Emergency Management and Homeland Security are team sports, and we have one of the best teams in the country supporting the District.

HSEMA’s mission is to ensure District agencies, businesses, and residents are prepared to prevent, protect against, respond to, mitigate, and recover from all threats and hazards. Having joined HSEMA seven years ago, I believe we are doing some of the best work the agency has ever done. I am honored to serve as HSEMA’s Interim Director and am proud to highlight just some of the work our team has done over the past 15 months supporting all areas of that mission.

I’ll begin with preparedness which is — simply put — everything we do every day across the District to build our capability to manage emergencies. Unlike response and recovery, preparedness is a long-game and requires our staff to stay focused on projects for months — or even years — at a time. I’d like to share several key milestones HSEMA accomplished in FY23 that materially improved our emergency response and recovery.



First, we have made critical revisions to much of our preparedness doctrine, which is the linked suite of plans that guide the various aspects of our response and recovery operations. This started with comprehensively updating the *District's Emergency Management Framework*, which outlines how we create a culture of preparedness. Second, we completed rewrites of the District's two core operations plans: *the Emergency Operations Plan* ("the EOP"), and the *Crisis Communications Plan*.

The EOP guides how District agencies and partners organize our people and resources during planned events and no-notice emergencies. Over the last five years, we have reimagined this plan to better reflect the unique needs and operational realities of our community and — for the first time — the EOP comprehensively integrates considerations for supporting people with disabilities and those with access and functional needs; it centers equity, diversity, and inclusion into every aspect of our planning. The *Crisis Communications Plan* marries up with the EOP and establishes how we develop and share life-saving information to the community before, during, and after emergencies. This 10-year update puts communications with residents and businesses at the center of our operations.

In October, we invited the *Emergency Management Accreditation Program* (EMAP) assessors to evaluate our program. This is our fourth reaccreditation assessment since 2003, when the District became just the second jurisdiction to achieve accreditation. The process involves a peer review across 66 standards and serves as the benchmark for emergency management program health.

Next, I'll focus on the most visible component of what we do — response operations, which has three enduring objectives: protect life, property, and the environment leading up to, during, and immediately after an emergency. Since the start of FY23, the agency has responded to 47 incidents.



The emergency operations center (EOC) was activated 19 times, and the Joint Information Center (JIC) was activated more than 50 days. From fire displacements to major floodings to active shooter scenes, HSEMA was there.

Many of these incidents were the types of emergencies our agency has spent years training for and has significant experience responding to. But — we also had to develop and execute plans to account for new and progressive threats and hazards. This included a cybersecurity incident as well as our first-ever activation for hazardous air quality in response to smoke from Canadian wildfires, both in June of 2023. During this incident, the JIC coordinated public safety messaging and precautions to educate our community while agencies met in the EOC to review plans for adjustments to city services.

Nothing truly encapsulates what we do better than the time period between January 13th and 21st, when we managed an unprecedented number of overlapping incidents without skipping a beat: two large-scale First Amendment events, two snowstorms, a two-alarm gas explosion in Historic Anacostia, and a Boil Water Advisory that impacted 19,000 customers — all while the District was under a life-threatening Cold Weather Emergency that lasted for nine days. It was a long couple of weeks and a great example of how our agency prepares, leads, coordinates, and supports District government and residents in their time of need.

I want to finish by talking about disaster recovery and community resilience. Recovery is the process we go through after an incident or emergency to return to a new normal. A thoughtful recovery process leaves the community better than before the emergency. Where response is often measured in days, weeks, or months, disaster recovery is measured in years and, sometimes, in decades.

Thanks to the efforts of our recovery team, the District has secured more than one billion



dollars (\$1,002,104,052) in reimbursements for COVID-19 from March 2020 through today. For scale, that is the 15th highest among all states and territories. These funds were critical to preserving our cash flow during COVID-19 and are now replenishing the District’s reserves.

Resilience, on the other hand, answers the question: what can we do to reduce our exposure to emergencies that will inevitably occur? To enhance our community’s resilience to disasters, we continue to pursue and receive grants from multiple FEMA programs, for flood mitigation and resilient power projects with a heavy focus on our historically underserved communities. In the most recent grant cycle, FEMA awarded the District \$670,000 to install a permanent generator at the Eastern Avenue Stormwater Pump Station, which will reduce the impacts of flooding in a historically flood-prone area of Ward 7.

I’m pleased to report continued progress on the St. Elizabeths microgrid project, which received \$20 million during a previous grant cycle. We have selected a design-build contractor, and we are actively working with DGS and OAG to reach a final agreement on the Power Purchase Agreement language to be submitted to Council. The project team also participated in the ANC 8C January meeting to introduce this project to community members.

Through the Interfaith Preparedness and Advisory Group, we assisted local non-profit and faith-based organizations in applying for the competitive Non-Profit Security Grant Program (NSGP), which supports physical security enhancements to eligible organizations that are at high risk of attack from extremists. In FY23, a total of \$2.7M was awarded to 20 DC applicants, and we look forward to assisting applicants when Congress passes a full-year FY24 budget.

I am proud of the HSEMA teams’ unwavering commitment to the residents, businesses, and visitors of the District of Columbia. I hope it is evident from this testimony — which presents just a snapshot of this year’s accomplishments — that they are dedicated to our mission, focused on



our customers, and relentlessly self-improving. I would like to take a moment to thank them for everything that they do.

I would also like to thank Mayor Muriel Bowser for her support and leadership, particularly with the opening in 2023 of the District's new EOC and JIC, and Deputy Mayor Lindsey Appiah for her continued guidance. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve. This concludes my testimony and I'm available to answer questions.

