



**New York State Legislative Commission on Rural Resources Hearing on the
Threat of Flooding in New York State**

February 25, 2020

Testimony

Good morning Chairwoman May and distinguished members of the Commission.

I am Dan O'Hara, Director of New York's Office of Emergency Management within the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you here today to discuss the tremendous work of our team, as well as how that work specifically relates to the number one natural threat facing New York – flooding.

I am sure most, if not everyone in this room has seen and understands, the widespread damage that flooding can cause. From the destruction of property and infrastructure to the disruption of water, sewer and telecom services, flood waters can devastate an entire community in only a few hours. Complicating matters further, not only is New York vulnerable to different forms of flooding given our geography, but approximately ninety percent of the state's population lives in a waterfront community, whether that be near a lake, river, ocean or otherwise.

While these basic realities have made it important that all levels of government work to strengthen their shorelines and infrastructure as we are seeing under the leadership of Governor Cuomo and the REDI Commission, it's also critical that communities, first responders and all New Yorkers are prepared and know how to recover. That's where we come in.

Throughout the year, state and local emergency management officials are regularly in contact and working to plan for the next natural disaster. However, planning only goes so far when you are dealing with an unpredictable situation. Whether it is daily update calls with officials, on-the-ground visits by state agency leaders to oversee response operations or otherwise, New York has made a concerted effort to ensure open lines of communication with our partners before, during and following a disaster. Through these efforts, state and local partners can work together to identify new and existing flood prone areas, improve the efficiency of asset delivery and deployment and ensure a rapid response to unforeseen problems.



Homeland Security and Emergency Services

We must also ensure our first responders are properly trained for flood response. Thanks to your support in previous budgets, the State's Preparedness and Training Center is now home to a world class Swift Water Rescue training facility which provides specialized training opportunities, which are difficult to find anywhere else for first responders. Since the facility's inception, more than 1,100 state and local first responders have been trained.

Training isn't just for first responders either – it's just as important that the public know what to do because after all, emergencies don't wait for help to arrive. Under the leadership of Governor Cuomo, the Division partnered with the National Guard and the Red Cross to establish the Citizen's Preparedness Corps in 2014. This program trains New Yorkers in an all-hazards approach to prepare for and respond to emergency situations. Since the program's inception, nearly 334,000 New Yorkers have received this training, with more than 56,000 trained in 2019 alone.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to appear today and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.