



NARC National Association of Regional Councils

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

HOMELAND SECURITY

BUILDING REGIONAL COMMUNITIES – LARGE, SMALL, URBAN AND RURAL – THROUGH ADVOCACY, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

ISSUE

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) supports protecting homeland security and improving preparedness through the inclusion of regional councils in coordination, planning and response efforts, specifically in language in the FY2008 Department of Homeland Security Authorization bill.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CONGRESS

- Recognize the network of regional councils as a means of accomplishing regional collaboration throughout the country and support regional approaches in developing emergency response plans that includes the use of multi-jurisdictional organizations where regional councils are not available to assess potential threats, identify existing equipment, assess equipment needs and develop strategic emergency response to terrorist attacks and natural disasters.
- Support the inclusion of a grant program that will provide funding to approved regional council grantees to enhance regional authority by providing opportunities to develop and promulgate homeland security planning and response on a regional-level with federal, state, local and regional partners.
- Require that all disaster strategies – including chemical, bio-terrorism, radiological, nuclear and explosive – to be incorporated into a regional strategy.
- Require states to pass-through a percentage of the 80 percent local funding for regional homeland security to develop security assessments and plans to include upgrades in GIS or other programs or equipment needed in the development of these plans.
- Recognize the unique needs of multi-state regions.
- Provide funding to states on the basis of identified needs.
- Require states to promptly disperse planning, equipment and training funds to local governments and their first responders consistent with local and regional needs assessment.

BACKGROUND

Numerous pieces of legislation and billions of dollars have addressed various homeland security and community preparedness issues, especially on the heels of the unanticipated, multiple events that affected the Gulf Coast. A major effort is needed to establish or fund planning on a multi-county basis. Emergency and contingency response plans do not lend themselves to development by a single jurisdiction. Experience has shown that it will take the coordinated efforts of numerous jurisdictions to successfully protect America's cities and counties, and the metropolitan and rural areas of the nation. A network of more than 500 regional councils of government, planning commissions and development districts throughout the country covering more than 35,000 of the 39,000 local governments are readily available to develop strategic assessments and plans for protecting the homeland and assuring communities are prepared for unanticipated events. Emergency response to manmade or natural disasters does not lend itself to a block grant approach. Funding needs to be apportioned to states based on identified potential terrorist targets and on tendency toward natural disasters, such as hurricanes, tornadoes, floods and earthquakes. Many lessons have been learned from the multiple events that have changed and affected the lives of millions of people in communities and regions throughout the nation.

In the aftermath of the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 and other catastrophic events, the National Association of Regional Councils has either surveyed or been in contact with regional councils of government, planning commissions and development districts to determine their actions to pull together the necessary players to develop a regional emergency response strategy. Many regional councils and metropolitan planning organizations have effectively responded and are still actively engaged in the many and diverse response activities. These responses have been shared with Congress, the Office of Homeland Security and the White house. Some of these activities have been showcased in NARC publications. In 2003, NARC worked with Rep. Jack Kingston (R-GA), who introduced the Regional Comprehensive Emergency Preparedness, Response and Coordination Act of 2003. This effort has been revived and reintroduced for language inclusion in the FY08 DHS authorization bill as a grant program.