

F R O M	Name & Title	Dr. Leana Wen, Commissioner 	Health Department AGENCY REPORT	
	Agency Name & Address	Health Department 1001 E. Fayette Street Baltimore, Maryland 21201		
	Subject	17-0052R – Informational Hearing - Baltimore’s Disaster Preparedness		

**To: President and Members
of the City Council
c/o 409 City Hall**

March 20, 2018

The Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) is pleased to have the opportunity to review #17-0052R – Informational Hearing - Baltimore’s Disaster Preparedness. The purpose of this legislation is to call upon City agencies to testify about the current state of Baltimore’s disaster preparedness and discuss lessons learned and applied from recent disaster responses.

Overview:

The Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) is a primary agency in the City Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). BCHD is the lead agency for Emergency Support Function-8 Health and Medical (ESF-8). Baltimore City Fire Department (BCFD) EMS is also a lead agency for ESF-8, and BCHD works closely with BCFD EMS on planning and response efforts related to public health during emergencies. On an ongoing basis, BCHD engages in planning and coordination with City hospitals and other healthcare facilities as part of its emergency preparedness planning through its Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response (OPHPR).

BCHD is also the lead agency for Emergency Support Function-16 Animal Protection planning in Baltimore City. The Bureau of Environmental Health and OPHPR in BCHD work closely with BARCS on their plans for the City animal shelter. BCHD is also a support agency to Emergency Support Function-6 Mass Care and Feeding and provides health and medical care services to residents who seek temporary housing at City emergency shelters.

BCHD’s OPHPR program is primarily funded by public health emergency preparedness grants from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The program has experienced significant funding cuts over the past three years that threaten the agency’s ability to continue to maintain the current public health preparedness efforts.

Key BCHD Public Health Emergency Preparedness Efforts

BCHD coordinates closely with hospitals in the city and the region, and engages with healthcare partners on a regular basis. BCHD is a member of the City Hospital Consortium which meets bimonthly to coordinate emergency planning and response efforts. A hospital MOU exists between Baltimore City hospitals to ensure and facilitate cooperation and sharing of medical resources in

the event of a disaster that exceeds the capacity of any of the city's hospitals to handle. BCHD is also an active participant of the Maryland Region III Health & Medical Coalition. The Coalition members are a diverse group of health and medical preparedness subject matter experts that meet monthly to collaborate and strengthen the health and medical preparedness and response capabilities of the region to enhance recovery and resiliency during an emergency or disaster incident. The Coalition develops guidelines, promotes best practices, builds partnerships and develops agreements for sharing resources. Through the Coalition, multiple preparedness trainings and exercises are organized with the region's healthcare community. Planned exercises for 2018 will focus on hospital surge and evacuation, information sharing, and emerging infectious diseases.

BCHD receives federal funding through the Cities Readiness Initiative (CRI), to work with local, regional, state, and private partners to develop plans for responding to a large-scale bioterrorist event by dispensing emergency medical countermeasures to the entire population within 48 hours. As part of the CRI requirements, BCHD conducts annual drills and exercises and is annually assessed by the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) and/or the CDC on its planning and operational capabilities.

BCHD has also invested in pandemic and emerging infectious disease preparation such as Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) and Zika. The BCHD Emerging Infectious Disease Response plan outlines the framework for the coordination of local, state, and federal efforts to prevent, stop and/or eliminate the spread of infectious diseases. Many plans and exercises with our healthcare facilities and state partners have been developed in order to test and enhance our preparations for EVD as Baltimore City facilities serve as Ebola Treatment Centers with enhanced capabilities to treat a patient with EVD. Additionally, BCHD recently acted to prepare for, respond to, and assist with recovery efforts from Zika cases within the City.

Code Blue and Code Red are multi-agency efforts lead by BCHD to provide relief from extreme cold/hot weather to vulnerable populations during the winter and summer seasons. Once a Code Blue/Red declaration is made, public messaging activities are undertaken to encourage safety, and response partners work to ensure those in need have services available to them. OPHPR develops daily weather surveillance reports during Code Red and Code Blue seasons that include upcoming weather, weather-related EMS calls and emergency department visits, and BGE power outages. OPHPR also produces weekly biosurveillance reports based on emergency department chief complaints to monitor health conditions in Baltimore City. Information in the biosurveillance reports can serve as an early alert of a public health emergency.

BCHD personnel are organized according to tiers with required and recommended emergency preparedness trainings. This requirement allows BCHD to provide effective emergency support to Baltimore City in the event that our city is affected by a disaster or public health emergency. Trainings include National Incident Management System (NIMS) trainings to orient public health responders to the nationwide framework and approach of emergency response, and Health Department-specific trainings to develop the specific skills and knowledge that BCHD employees will need as public health responders.

BCHD regularly conducts drills and exercises as part of our preparedness grant requirements, but also to test and enhance our preparedness capabilities. In FY17, BCHD participated in 19 drills, 2

workshops, 2 tabletop exercises, 2 functional exercises, and 3 real-world events. For each of these activities, OPHPR documents lessons learned and develops corrective actions to ensure strengths and gaps are identified and necessary improvements are made. BCHD follows Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program standards for all drills and exercises conducted.

Lessons Learned from Recent National Disasters

Through the information and experience gained from last fall's hurricane season, BCHD is gaining a better understanding of the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) process. EMAC is a state-to-state mutual aid compact that facilitates the sharing of services, personnel and equipment across state lines during times of disaster and emergency. BCHD is working with MDH and the other local health departments in Maryland to look at the process in more detail so we can be better prepared to request and supply support when needed.

The 2017 hurricanes also highlighted the importance of continuity of operations (COOP) and devolution planning to ensure the critical functions of BCHD can be maintained. In October 2017, BCHD updated its agency and program COOP plans to reevaluate critical services, make staffing updates, and reevaluate essential services for the agency.

The importance of recovery planning was a key lesson learned from Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria; specifically, the need to have a pre-disaster Recovery Plan in place. BCHD is currently developing a draft pre-disaster recovery plan that aligns with the National Disaster Recovery Framework that will be complete by July 1, 2018.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this bill. The Health Department believes in keeping our officials and the public informed of our disaster preparedness programming, and urges a favorable report on Council Bill #17-0052R.