

Nicole Roy, Long Term Recovery Project Coordinator | The Salvation Army

Topics of the briefing for The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights will explore the following items:

DUE to submit by Friday, June 11, 2021

Written statements and testimony in blue

1. To what extent did FEMA's response to Hurricanes María and Harvey comply with the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Act (Stafford Act), along with other federal civil rights law and policies?

There was some synchronized and systematically distributed effort throughout the 76 municipalities of the main island of Puerto Rico, the two smaller island Culebra and Vieques. Uniformity in identifying unmet needs was established.

2. How was federal funding budgeted for and allocated across natural disasters for the 2017 season?

I apologize, I am not privy or have insight into this specific topic.

3. How does FEMA plan, coordinate, and execute emergency management in administering hurricane aid relief in collaboration with other federal organizations as well as state, local, and tribal lands?

I apologize, I am not privy or have insight into this specific topic. When working with FEMA and PREMA here in Puerto Rico the organizations were very separate in their response efforts and operations.

4. What types of assistance are provided to individuals and what is the trajectory of post-hurricane relief, such as evacuation to safety, temporary shelter, health care, food, clothing, housing, unemployment benefits or training, and rebuilding? Are these provided through individual or block assistance, programs entitling payments, or other programs entitling other relief?

In the first 12-18 months of the disaster aftermath much of the listed was provided to survivors in centralized areas within the communities. Since the initial response phase, the recovery phase has been strongly dependent upon NGO through grants and the CDBG funds.

5. Examining the federal response to Hurricanes María and Harvey, to include:

- a. Accessibility of requests for aid, and any barriers

In Puerto Rico, the DRC and CRC locations were extremely helpful. Some survivors in rural areas had difficulties to get to the locations preventing them from efficient recovery aid.

- b. Number of requests for assistance; Number of individuals/households provided assistance

There is a difference in those that applied and those that received, one major cause was denial of funds due to the difficulties proving ownership of home, a common issue here in Puerto Rico.

- c. Any relevant disparities and inequities associated with access to relief aid, including placement and staffing of centers, hot-line staffing, contractor hiring and staffing, and access to appeals procedures

Many survivors in rural areas that did not have access to transportation had difficulties reaching FEMA centers, delaying services.

- d. Monetary amount of relief provided, including any demographic and geographic distribution within a disaster declaration area

No response.

- e. Any logistical issues in administering disaster relief

Delays in rural areas for assessment and access to centers.

- f. Any types of civil rights complaints received

No.

- 6. What challenges, if any, did federal agencies face in working with state and local governments and private sector responses to these disasters?

To my knowledge some challenges were clear communication, cohesive direction and partnership in response and recovery efforts, some competitiveness, frustrations with an understanding and funds appropriated, and delays with funds.

- 7. What is the status of ongoing rebuilding efforts in Puerto Rico and the Houston area?

In the Puerto Rico area rebuild efforts are primarily divided between smaller NGOs and local churches, and the program COR3 (R3) created from the CDBG funds. Both rebuild results have been drastically delayed due to Covid-19. R3 has a considerable wait list, and a considerable percentage of survivors are awaiting evaluation.

- a. What is known about any permanent displacement of residents?

With a significant shortage of section 8 housing and a long wait list for approval, many survivors have had to continue to live with family members.

- b. Has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted any of these efforts?

Yes, with significant delays. The elderly and those living in poverty have been greatly impacted as they do not have knowledge or access to online resources or aid.