

Testimony to Senate Government Operations
Re: State Response to Flood Recovery in Montpelier, Vermont
William Fraser, City Manager

Positive Aspects of the State's Response:

State Responsiveness:

The State was prompt in addressing major needs, such as ensuring water supply, especially significant since Barre was under a boil water notice during the flood response.

Effective Communication:

The communication from the State was frequent and relevant, aiding in timely updates and guidance.

VEM "Ticket" System:

The "ticket" system implemented by the Vermont Emergency Management (VEM) for resource and assistance requests largely functioned well, facilitating organized response efforts.

Agency of Transportation (AOT) Performance:

AOT's rapid response in clearing landslides and assisting with paving in critical areas like N. Main Street was exemplary and greatly appreciated.

Areas for Improvement:

Failure of the 211 System:

Directing people to 211 as per State's guidance led to a lack of local data collection. This resulted in operating at a data deficit throughout the response, hindering effective decision-making and resource allocation.

Issues with Points of Contact:

The frequent change of individuals assigned to liaise with the City caused confusion and inefficiency. A more stable and consistent point of contact is necessary for effective coordination.

Need for Specialized Equipment:

The lack of specialized equipment for debris clearance under bridges was notable. Given the increasing frequency and intensity of storms, there's an urgent need for the City and State to access or own such equipment for rapid deployment.

Positive Aspects of the State's Response

Immediate Outreach from SEOC:

The prompt response and engagement from the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) were commendable.

Effective Communication:

Key state officials maintained effective communication throughout the crisis.

State-Led Debris Removal:

The State taking charge of debris removal significantly aided local recovery efforts.

Cooperation with Building and General Services (BGS):

BGS's cooperation on Montpelier specific issues was instrumental in addressing local needs.

Funding for Business Assistance:

The provision of funding to assist businesses impacted by the flood was a crucial support measure.

Challenges in the State's Response

Mixed Messages from SEOC:

Inconsistent information from SEOC regarding available resources and support caused confusion.

Conflicting Guidance to Businesses:

Discrepancies in directives between the Department of Public Safety and the Department of Health complicated the response for businesses.

Unclear Roles of FEMA Personnel:

The presence of many FEMA representatives without clear roles made it challenging to navigate assistance channels. The State could have facilitated better clarity.

Need for Clearer Safety Guidelines:

More explicit guidelines about handling flood water, including appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), were needed.

Assistance for Larger Scale Challenges:

Support for significant challenges, like clearing bridge debris, was necessary and beyond the scope of local government capabilities.

Outreach to Non-FEMA Aid Recipients:

Direct outreach was needed for businesses that did not qualify for FEMA aid.

The Cities of Barre and Montpelier strongly support [H.723](#). This omnibus bill has many benefits to our communities including:

- Tax Relief and Business Grants
- Mitigation and Preparedness Funding
- Establishing best practices for rebuilding homes and mandating flood history disclosure are in line with the call for clearer guidelines and information dissemination.
- Municipal relief to support local governments in maintaining services and recovery efforts
- Expansion of Business Emergency Gap Assistance Program: **(By covering a broader range of business needs such as payroll and administrative needs, the program can more effectively aid in the recovery and continuity of local businesses.)**