

Deputy Commissioner Jen Hollar
Department of Housing and Community Development
Testimony before the House Government Affairs Committee
Section 11 of S.168
April 11, 2014

Good Morning. My name is Jen Hollar and I serve as the Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Housing and Community Development. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to Section 11 of S. 168. The purpose is to establish disaster-related condemnation authority at the municipal level.

You may recall that mobile home owners were particularly hard hit by Tropical Storm Irene. The lack of clear and ready condemnation authority at the local level limited their ability to access full assistance through FEMA's Individual Assistance Program. This limitation was identified in the After Action Reviews led by the Department of Public Safety following Irene and also in our Department's recent *Report on the Viability and Disaster Resilience of Mobile Home Ownership and Parks*. A link to the report is on the committee's website and the discussion of this issue can be found on page 36 and more extensively in Appendix 5.

When we realized that mobile home owners were typically receiving only \$5,000 for their destroyed homes, and that FEMA was not accepting condemnation letters from local officials as proof that their homes could not be reoccupied, we worked to establish an ad hoc program at the state level. It is detailed in the report but essentially we were able to use authority within the Governor's emergency powers to issue condemnation letters for 130 mobile homes that resulted in more than \$1 million in additional IA payments to survivors. In most instances, this meant the maximum FEMA grant of \$30,200. However, this was a one time solution and depended upon FEMA's willingness to reopen cases. Not something we can rely upon the next time a disaster hits.

The language in subsection (26) of Section 11 results from conversations with the Department of Fire Safety, the Department of Health, the Governor's Counsel and the League of Cities and Towns. Karen Horn and VLCT developed this language with input from our Department based on our work with FEMA. It gives municipalities the authority to "condemn to be destroyed" post-disaster. The Senate agreed to add the language to S.168 and I hope your committee will support it as well.

With that, I'm happy to answer any questions.