



Lamoille Area Recovery Network Testimony: Response, Recovery and Resiliency

Thank you for allowing me to testify remotely and for the opportunity to comment on the proposed legislation to help our state focus on response, recovery, and resiliency after natural disasters.

For the record, my name is Sarah Henshaw and I am the Coordinator for the Lamoille Area Recovery Network (affectionately known as LeARN) - the Lamoille County long-term recovery group. In this role, I have seen the critical importance of 211 data and individual recovery assistance and support. Just yesterday, I spoke to three families that reached out to us for support. Each house had more than 3 feet of water in it, damaging basements and living spaces. To date, all three families have either maxed out credit cards or significantly tapped into their household savings. All three have used financial assistance they received from FEMA for repairs. None received insurance pay outs because they their homes weren't in flood plains. Assessments have shown all three still have significant repairs - one house has serious mold issues causing families to have persistent coughs, one house has a failed septic due to the floods, and the last still has contaminated fuel in their oil tanks in their moist basement. Damaged walls, floors still exist in all three. There are dozens more like this throughout Lamoille.

Had our LTRG existed AND received 211 information on households reporting damage in July, we would have been able to help these families start their recovery journey. They had all called 211. They might not have a cough developed through 9 months of living in a moldy home. They might not have depleted savings and retirement accounts. They may have floors and walls that are not flood damaged. We have many more households in similar situations across our county. While LeARN is able to help now, systemic changes in how we collect and disseminate information on impacted households is critical for recovery. It is also critical that individual assistance provision is integrated throughout emergency management planning and preparedness at all levels (state, regional, and local) to ensure there is an entity charged with supporting impacted households.

To this end, I recommend the following:

- Data on impacted households needs to be made available to local responders, LTRGs, and local civil society organizations providing recovery support in a timely manner. This could be through an updated, functioning 211 or another platform like FindHelp.
- Households reporting data should be asked permission to share their data with local responders, LTRGs, and local civil society organizations providing recovery support.
- LTRGs or other local recovery civil society organizations need to be included in local emergency response committees and plans. The state needs to provide more than one staff member to individual recovery assistance.

- Emergency shelters need to be pre-identified and there needs to be a link between American Red Cross immediate shelter support and LTRGs that will support households over their long recovery journey.
- The state needs to support sustaining LTRGs between emergency and disaster events to ensure there are systems to stand up and support individuals and households as soon as recovery begins after events.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide this insight and recommendations.