

Governor's Emergency Communications Task Force Minutes, Monday, April 28, 2014, Meeting

Present: Commissioner Dora Schriro, *DESPP*; Sulma Avenancio, *Univision TV*; Brenda Bergeron, *DESPP/DEMHS*; Catherine Blinder, *Dept. of Consumer Protection*, Richard Branigan, *Red Cross*; Scott DeVico, *DESPP (by phone)*; Kelly Donnelly, *Dept. of Education*; Angel Fernandez-Chavero, *Aspire Praxis*; Paul Giguere, *CT Public Affairs Network*; Subira Gordon, *African American Affairs Comm*; William Hackett, *DESPP/DEMHS*; Samaia Hernandez, *Governor's Office*; Kathleen Kabara, *Dept. of Rehabilitation Services*; Gretchen Knauff, *Protection & Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities*; Maria Lino, *The Latino Way*; Stephanie Marino, *Dept. on Aging*; Emanuela Palmares-Leaf, *Latino & Puerto Rican Affairs Comm.* (by phone); Richard Porth, *United Way of CT*; Steve Rabb, *FOX CT*; Jon Slifka, *Gov's. Liaison to the Disability Community*; An-Ming Truxes, *Asian Pacific American Affairs Comm*; Mike Varney, *DESPP*; Dr. Diana Rios, *UCONN*; Carey Thompson, *Division of Statewide Telecommunications*; Katie Blint, *Northeast Utilities*

Absent: April Capone, Garrett Eucalitto, *OPM*; William Gerrish, *DPH*; Daniel Micari, *DDS*

I. Welcome and Introductions

Commissioner Schriro convened the meeting and welcomed everyone, thanking them for their attendance and engagement with this Task Force. The minutes from the March 31, 2014 meeting were reviewed and approved unanimously, with one change: first full paragraph on p.2, second and third sentences now read, "An-Ming Truxes stated that over 157,000 Asian Americans live in Connecticut, and within that population, there are likely 50 distinct sub-groups. Approximately 40,000 of that population speak English less than well." Acceptance moved by Paul Giguere, seconded by Catherine Blinder. The Commissioner reviewed the Task Force Mission, and asked if anyone had additional thoughts out the scope of our work before the three subcommittees reported on their activities. Rick Porth stated that the process of getting together in groups has already been beneficial.

II. Briefing from Working Groups and Discussion

Samaia Hernandez reported out for both the Communications Methods and Best Practices groups. The groups discussed the following possible priorities:

- Texting, social media
- Campaign to get emergency alerts out. Scott DeVico will follow up.
- Ensuring that a sign interpreter is present for all of the Governor's press conferences at the State Emergency Operations Center, and also that the screen shot include the interpreter.

- Consider adding Google Translate to certain state websites. Group members raised some concerns about this suggestion because there have been some anecdotal stories that the system does not translate accurately.
- Convene separate meetings with the Board of Regents, and perhaps UConn as well, to provide assistance in translating press releases, etc.

Paul Giguere of CTN said that the network is effectively another vital utility during emergencies. With live video fees and web cast, CTN could provide URL to any broadcaster to add to their site to provide a live audio feed. Paul also offered to explore the possibility of providing a second closed captioning stream in Spanish. He will be working with DEMHS on participating in the June statewide drill in order to test some options, including a connection back to the four major networks and Univision.

The group discussed selecting Spanish as the first language to pilot with CTN and then assess its applicability for other languages as well. Telemondo will also be contacted.

DRS reported that it polled its staff on their language and other skills and now, staff volunteers take calls from other-language speakers. Brenda Bergeron suggested that we could make this type of information gathering a part of the state agency Continuity of Operations Plan template that DEMHS is drafting.

Steve Rabb stated that the National Association of State Broadcasters Associations has a questionnaire that is circulating regarding state language issues, and CT's response may be useful to this group.

The group discussed how to address the fact that people with functional needs often don't self-identify.

Bill Hackett asked how United Way 211 handles emergency calls from non-English speaking people. Tanya Barrett stated that, within an average of 30 seconds, their third party vendor, Tele-interpreter, comes on the call, which becomes a three-way call with the caller, the call specialist, and the interpreter. Rick Porth indicated that the 211 system has the demographics of their calls for the last 2-3 years. Catherine Blinder noted that non-English speaking languages usually reflect the most recent immigrant communities.

Commissioner Schriro noted that the group should begin to think about what should be included in the messages as well as how to message.

Samaia Hernandez suggested that messaging include a request for neighbors to check on neighbors, thus supporting the notion of self-reliance and resiliency.

Catherine Blinder reported out from the group whose task was to identify the diverse groups of residents with special needs. Ms. Blinder's full summary notes are attached with these minutes. In general, the following categories were identified:

Those with specialized language needs:

Nearly 300 languages are spoken in the state, with Hartford County and Fairfield County having the largest populations of non English speakers.

Discrete populations that may need specialized modes of communication:

- Disabled communities
 - those with physical/mental disabilities as well as those who are sight and hearing impaired and blind and deaf
- Homeless/ living in shelters
- Residents of group homes or other institutional facilities
- New immigrants and refugees and undocumented individuals
- Home-bound, including elderly
- Low income
- Low literacy and illiterate
- Commuters
- Transients (tourists/visitors)
- Those dependent on Durable Medical Equipment/DME
- Transient workers
- Those without computers or access to the internet
- Most challenging, those who choose not to self-identify with any group.

The group then discussed methods of reaching out to the various communities:

- Simple warning logo that directs person to the person they trust to translate for them, to review warning message
- Media, including ethnic media resources, to bridge the gap between the community and government: PSA messaging
- Community organizers
- Message trees
- Consulates
- Local neighborhood stores
- Faith-based organizations
- Social services
- Portable highway signs
- Cellphones—almost everyone has one or has access to one
- Electronic billboards
- Information banners or boards at local intersections
- Radio-local v XM

- Handouts, posters at local gathering places (supermarkets, doctors' offices, health clinics, senior centers, Dunkin Donuts-type locations)
- Electronic messaging machines such as are used by the lottery
- Small card for refrigerator
- Messaging through and to the durable medical equipment vendors (oxygen, batteries, etc...) How does DPH tie into this?

Commissioner Schriro said that the goal of the group is to be as inclusive as possible, and encouraged the group to scan in and send to her the types of communications products that they see as best practices and we will share with group, such as the Northeast Utilities card described below.

The group considered the difference between the Emergency Alert System (EAS) and the Emergency Notification System (ENS.) They also discussed the new Integrated Public Alert Warning System (IPAWS), and will explore whether that warning can be broadcast in different languages. Bill Hackett will look into whether this is the case. Mike Varney stated that the state's current ENS vendor, Everbridge, has a system which is used in New Orleans, allowing people to self-identify their communications needs. Mike and Carey Thompson will look into the State's contract with Everbridge to see if a similar system can be put into place here. Jonathan Slifka pointed out that we may need to adjust our thinking on the opt-in concept—it is a good practice but may not be the best because during an emergency, effective notification must include all people. Kelly Donnelly from the Department of Education spoke of the Freedom of Information considerations associated with collecting personal information.

Dr. Rios indicated that UConn and Eastern CT State University are working on a project involving Spanish language issues. She stated that people sometimes expect the Spanish media, who are understaffed, to translate documents free of charge. Sulma Avenancio of Univision TV said that, in emergency situations, we have to get the message out ASAP.

Commissioner Schriro thanked Northeast Utilities for their voluntary involvement in this group. Katie Blint from NU passed around a notice that accompanied recent customer bills with a simple warning logo on it, and then the phrase "please have this translated for you immediately" in a variety of languages. The rest of the notice described a scam that involved utilities and warned people to ask for credentials, etc... We will invite utility representatives to the next meeting to present other best practices and describe collaboration possibilities.

Samaia Hernandez talked about how best to partner with municipalities. The group discussed the importance of including Mass Care partners in this discussion. Local Emergency Management Director, Fire Chief, and Police Chief should be invited to next meeting. Bill Hackett stated that Arkansas has a website, Arkansasmatters.com, and maybe we could do a similar website in Connecticut. Another idea from Richard

Branigan of the Red Cross is to tie in members of this group with the Mass Care Task Force at the State Emergency Operations Center. This would give the State EOC a point of contact on language issues.

Richard Branigan suggested that this group's report might include a tool box, with a list of key players in ethnic communities. Catherine Blinder said she is continuing to work on creating that list. Richard stated that the group could recommend/create a resource book. Connecticut's local nonprofit association, Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) may be able to help.

The next meeting of the Task Force is scheduled for Wednesday May 28 from 9 to 11 am in Room 348 at DESPP headquarters, 1111 Country Club Road, Middletown. The agenda will include utilities and local first responder and emergency management officials to provide their insight on best practices. Terry Edelstein, the Governor's Liaison to the non-profit community as well as representatives from the Council of Small Towns (COST) and the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) will also be invited.