



Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service

NEWS RELEASE

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COA Endorses White House Katrina Report - Calls for Dedicated Resources to Implement Recommendations

Landover, MD, Feb 24 -- The Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service (COA) adds its voice to the chorus commending the White House Katrina Report. COA represents the interests of active duty, reserve, and retired officers of the PHS Commissioned Corps. The Association wholeheartedly endorses the recommendations in the White House report to transfer and consolidate all public health emergency response resources and activities within the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

In particular, COA fully supports the immediate transfer of the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) back to DHHS. Further, we support the alignment of NDMS, along with the Medical Reserve Corps, and all other public health emergency planning and operations under the Office of the Surgeon General and the PHS Commissioned Corps.

COA had long maintained that the rationale for having a uniformed cadre of public health professionals in the PHS Commissioned Corps was to provide a measure of federal direction and leadership for the vast and varied components of the national security public health infrastructure. The Association specifically endorses recommendations 58 and 59 of the White House report. It is clear that the U.S. Surgeon General is the single federal official with the recognized confidence of the general public to lead the national response in a public health emergency. The Nation's Uniformed Services have consistently and deservedly enjoyed the public's greatest confidence and the Surgeon General and officers of the PHS Commissioned Corps are no exception to that rule.

The outlines of a credible and effective national public health emergency response command and control structure already exist. Aligning the various components under a lineal chain of command with the Surgeon General as its leader will go a long way to resolving the confusion and overlapping authorities evident in the Katrina response. Resources to accomplish the tasks assigned to the Office of the Surgeon General are essential and must be provided quickly. COA estimates \$50 million as the minimum amount that needs to be added to the OSG budget to ensure that our public health infrastructure is prepared for the next hurricane season – or any other disaster.

The direction is clear and unequivocal. What is needed now is the political will and dedication of resources necessary to ensure the most fundamental component of our national security – the national public health.

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