



**American Red Cross**  
Hawaii

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Honolulu City Council Hearing  
Wednesday, June 1, 2016, 10:00am  
City Council Chamber

Testimony of Coralie Chun Matayoshi  
CEO, American Red Cross of Hawaii

[Bill 14 (2016), CD2: Relating to the Executive Operating Budget and Program for FY17]

The mission of the Red Cross is to prevent and alleviate human suffering in the face of emergencies by mobilizing the power of volunteers and the generosity of donors.

The American Red Cross of Hawaii requests your support in appropriating funding for our Disaster Response & Preparedness Program to benefit all communities on Oahu. The Red Cross works side by side police, fire, civil defense, and the military, and is the only nonprofit organization that responds to disasters 24/7, 365 days a year. Our services are essential and irreplaceable as we assist the county, state, and federal government in their responsibility to provide for the welfare of those who reside in their jurisdictions.

Although the American Red Cross is not a government agency, it is mandated by Congress to provide disaster relief assistance. This is an unfunded responsibility that requires the Red Cross to provide emergency mass care and assistance for individuals with urgent and verified disaster-caused needs. The Red Cross is also designated as the lead primary organization by all Counties to plan and execute disaster shelter operations. In August 2015, the Red Cross signed an agreement with FEMA that renewed the Red Cross' role as the co-lead for provision of mass care under the National Response Framework, along with the Department of Homeland Security/FEMA. As a co-lead, the Red Cross is responsible for fulfilling the mass care portion of Emergency Support Function 6 (ESF-6), including feeding, sheltering, bulk distribution and family reunification. The Red Cross continues to be a support agency to the other components of ESF-6, which includes Emergency Assistance, Housing and Human Services. In addition, the agreement was expanded to ensure the partnership covered the entire disaster cycle—preparedness, response and recovery.

The primary goal of the Red Cross Disaster Response & Preparedness Program is to recruit, train, and coordinate volunteers to be on call to provide immediate assistance to victims of natural and man-made disasters anytime, anywhere throughout the state. Our immediate and compassionate services reduce the harsh physical and emotional distress that prevents people from meeting their own basic needs and helps them get back on their feet after tragedy has struck. Red Cross is the safety net that no other entity provides. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, from 2010 - 2014, 9.8% of Oahu's population lived below the poverty level, and in FY15, at least 18% of the disaster families we served statewide were below the poverty guidelines set by the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (this doesn't count all of the people, especially the homeless, who fled to our shelters during Hurricane Iselle).

Besides food, clothing, and shelter, we provide invaluable crisis counseling through trained volunteer mental health professionals. This service is particularly critical when the disaster involves fatalities or life threatening injuries. Volunteer caseworkers are on the scene within two hours of any disaster to help the family cope with their losses and to make sure they have long-term resources in place to assist with their recovery. Our volunteer nurses are also there to replace prescription medication and assistive devices, like eye glasses and walkers.

In FY15 (7/1/14 – 6/30/15), we responded to 36 disasters on Oahu and assisted 186 individuals. Through community disaster education outreach, we shared critical disaster preparedness information with 19,133 people on Oahu on how to prepare for emergencies. We held 43 disaster trainings, issued 443 disaster training certificates, and maintained a base of 459 active and trained Oahu disaster volunteers.

During the first eight months of FY16 (7/1/15 – 2/29/16), we have already responded to 30 disasters on Oahu in Wahiawa, Honolulu, Kapolei, Kunia, Pauoa, Kaneohe, Manoa, Waipahu, Aiea, Waianae, Makiki, Kaimuki, Haleiwa, Nanakuli, Makaha, Pearl City, Mililani, Kalihi, and Waimanalo. We have reached over 24,900 residents with disaster preparedness information, held 17 disaster volunteer trainings, and issued 265 training certificates to Oahu disaster volunteers. Throughout the year, we will continue to train more volunteers, conduct disaster preparedness education outreach in the community and provide disaster relief assistance.

Hawaii is the most isolated population on the face of the earth, so we work hard to teach families, communities, and businesses how to prepare for disasters. An investment in community education and capacity building now will help reduce the impact of a catastrophic disaster and will help save lives. Every \$1 invested in pre-disaster preparedness and risk reduction activities saves over \$4 in post-disaster response and recovery expenses (Multihazard Mitigation Council 2005). While we cannot control the timing of disasters, we can make sure we are as prepared as possible. Time and again, we have seen that well-prepared communities fare better following disasters: more lives are saved, less money is required for recovery, and everyone stabilizes more quickly when a community is resilient (Disaster Resilience: A National Imperative, National Research Council, Washington D.C., Academies Press, 2012).

Across the nation, seven people die every day in a home fire. Smoke alarms cut the rate of death in half. In an effort to save lives, the Red Cross is targeting vulnerable populations like the elderly, poor, disabled, non-English speaking, and rural communities and installing free smoke alarms in their homes. Our volunteers also teach them about fire safety and help them plan escape routes from each room in their house. While no one is immune to home fires, several distinct at-risk families and neighborhoods have higher rates of vulnerability:

- Elderly - adults over the age of 65 face heightened risks from disasters of all types. Seniors are more than twice as likely to die in home fires as the average American. By 2030, Hawaii's senior population will rise from 15% to 23%.
- Youth - children are generally more vulnerable to disasters because of their level of physical, social and cognitive development. Additionally, children tend to rank hazardous events as one of their major fears, which can be intensified by the media's uneven coverage of the devastation caused by rare, high-impact events.

- Low-income populations - there is a strong correlation between home fire deaths and poverty. This could be attributed to the fact that individuals living at or below the poverty line may find it cost prohibitive to purchase fire-safe products, smoke alarms and fire extinguishers.
- Disabled populations - physical disability is a contributing factor in 14% of all home fire deaths. Over half of all physically disabled fire victims nationwide were involved in accidental ignition and were in the room of origin when the fire started.
- Rural communities - a strong inverse correlation exists between community size and the risk of fire-related fatalities. Rural areas tend to suffer more damage from home fires because fires typically burn longer, both because of the greater distances emergency-response teams must travel to respond and because of low population density, which often leads to a longer reporting time.

Our Disney Pillowcase Project teaches children how to prepare for disasters, the science behind disasters, and coping techniques. The children get to decorate and take home a pillowcase that serves as their disaster kit.

Our free online Ready Rating website allows businesses, schools, and organizations to assess their readiness, offers customized feedback, and helps them create an emergency plan. 90% of small businesses will fail within two years of a major disaster, and since the vast majority of businesses in Hawaii are small, our whole economy depends on businesses being prepared before disaster strikes.

Our free Emergency App includes over 35 different severe weather and emergency alerts, maps to find the nearest open shelter, step-by-step instructions on what to do before, during, and after a disaster strikes. There is even a one touch "I'm safe" button that allows you to broadcast reassurance to family and friends via social media outlets that you are out of harm's way. The app also provides lifesaving first aid instructions, diagrams, and videos on what to do for 20 emergencies like heart attack, stroke, bleeding, choking, head injuries, burns, broken bones, asthma attack, diabetic emergency, heat stroke, seizure, poisoning, bee stings, allergies, and unconsciousness. It also includes a Pet First Aid App with expert veterinarian advice on 25 of most common pet emergencies, including car accidents, choking, drowning, mouth to snout resuscitation, dehydration, how to remove stinger from bee sting, allergies, and poisoning, allergies, how to give medication, travel tips, and GPS enabled guide to locate the nearest emergency veterinarian hospital or pet friendly hotel.

Of all of the Hawaiian Islands, Oahu would suffer most because of its high rises and dense population. For everyone's sake, we need a strong Red Cross, and we humbly ask for your support.