



One Hundred Fifteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515

June 6, 2018

Ms. Gail McGovern
President and Chief Executive Officer
American Red Cross
2025 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20006

Dear Ms. McGovern:

As the 2018 Atlantic hurricane season begins, I write to you today to reiterate my concerns about the American Red Cross's (ARC) ability to be a reliable partner to communities during natural disaster response.

On April 9, the Committee on Homeland Security held a hearing entitled, "Houston Strong: Hurricane Harvey Lessons Learned and the Path Forward" to engage with Federal, state, and local witnesses about the response to Hurricane Harvey. Leading up to the hearing, there were several disturbing news reports about ARC's lack of organization in carrying out response activities after Hurricane Harvey. Local officials noted that ARC was "completely out of resources" and had "no road accessibility."¹ In fact, local officials in communities became so frustrated with ARC's shortcomings that they urged leaders to open their own shelters and provide "their own food, sleeping bags, clothes, medication, etc."² Even Texas Governor Greg Abbott, said that ARC was not getting help to Texans in a "timely" or "well-organized, well-directed fashion."³

The hearing testimony we received matched news reports on ARC's Hurricane Harvey response. Specifically, we received testimony from Harris County Commissioner Jack Cagle that there were "difficulties in dealing with the Red Cross," and that ARC was not prepared for the challenges brought on by Hurricane Harvey.⁴ Additionally, Commissioner Cagle pointed to ARC's inability

¹ Elliott, Justin, Jessica Huseman, and Decca Muldowney. "Texas Official After Harvey: The 'Red Cross Was Not There.'" ProPublica. October 3, 2017. Accessed April 12, 2018. <https://www.propublica.org/article/texas-official-after-harvey-the-red-cross-was-not-there>.

² Id.

³ Rossman, Sean, Eleanor Dearman, and John C. Moritz. "Red Cross Floundered in Hurricane Harvey Relief Effort, Texas Leaders, Residents Say." USA Today. November 07, 2017. Accessed April 05, 2018. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2017/11/07/red-cross-floundered-hurricane-harvey-relief-effort-texas-leaders-residents-say/839619001/>.

⁴ *Houston Strong: Hurricane Harvey Lessons Learned and the Path Forward*, 115th Cong. (2018) (testimony of Commissioner Jack Cagle).

to urgently open storm shelters, which resulted in the community forging its own path to open shelters without ARC's assistance.⁵ Similarly, Missouri City, Texas Mayor Allen Owen noted that when city-operated shelters were in need of beds, ARC was not able to distribute the beds in its possession.⁶ As a result, Mayor Owen had to use a SWAT vehicle to distribute the beds to its storm shelters.⁷

The news reports and hearing testimony are very troubling, but not surprising given ARC's inadequate response to past disasters.⁸ For an entity chartered by Congress and authorized in the Stafford Act to provide much-needed assistance to Americans in times of disaster, ARC's response in Texas was, again, unacceptable.

As the new hurricane season begins, it is important to understand whether ARC has evaluated the lessons learned from its response to Hurricane Harvey and implemented necessary changes. Therefore, pursuant to Rule X and Rules XI of the U.S. House of Representatives, please respond to the following questions in writing by June 20, 2018:

1. Has ARC conducted a formal evaluation of its response to the 2017 hurricane season? If yes, please provide your findings. If not, why not?
2. Does ARC have a consistent policy across the U.S. on providing mass care supplies/inventory on a local level? If no, explain. If yes, please provide this policy.
3. How does ARC communicate with community leaders to notify them when ARC is unable to provide resources in a timely manner following a disaster? Please share examples of these communications from the 2017 hurricane season, and any information that would provide guidance on how these notifications will be sent in the future.
4. How is ARC working to ensure community-level training is provided prior to disasters and that ARC has enough volunteers and/or staff available to provide sufficient Americans with Disabilities Act accessible services in impacted communities?

Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Alison Northrop, Chief Director of Oversight, at 202-226-2616.

Sincerely,



BENNIE G. THOMPSON
Ranking Member

⁵ Id.

⁶ *Houston Strong: Hurricane Harvey Lessons Learned and the Path Forward*, 115th Cong. (2018) (testimony of Mayor Allen Owen).

⁷ Id.

⁸ Sullivan, Laura. "In Search Of The Red Cross' \$500 Million In Haiti Relief." NPR. June 03, 2015. Accessed April 12, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/2015/06/03/411524156/in-search-of-the-red-cross-500-million-in-haiti-relief>.