

EMERGENCY VOLUNTEER ACTION NETWORK

A national coalition of public, private, and nonprofit agencies supporting improved emergency legal preparedness



December 7, 2007



Martha Lee Walters, President
National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws
211 E. Ontario Street, Suite 1300
Chicago, IL 60611
Re: Support for Expanded Volunteer Legislation



Dear Ms. Walters:

The organizations represented below strongly support the passage of the Uniform Emergency Volunteer Health Practitioners Act (UEVHPA) that was passed by the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws (NCCUSL) in July 2007. Passage of this bill will ensure that a large force of professional volunteer healthcare practitioners, including veterinarians, will be in a position to provide assistance to the victims of declared emergencies, including natural disasters, public health emergencies and terrorist incidents. The legislation provides needed mechanisms for the interstate recognition of professional licenses issued to health practitioners, while also ensuring that practitioners will be deployed and utilized in close cooperation with, and under the supervision and control of, state and local emergency management agencies.



We also strongly support proposals to improve and strengthen existing state Good Samaritan Laws. Passage of UEVHPA, together with the strengthening and improvement of Good Samaritan Laws, will provide for the coherent use of volunteers and service organizations at all levels during a catastrophic disaster.



The events surrounding Hurricane Katrina vividly demonstrated the need for combined legislative effort in the area of volunteer services. Sadly, despite the best efforts of many state officials, volunteers, and disaster relief organizations, the deployment of many healthcare volunteers was delayed due to confusion regarding licensing recognition, concerns about civil liability, and lack of adequate medical coverage for the volunteers themselves.

Center for Biosecurity of UPMC



This response problem as it relates to healthcare practitioners was recognized by NCCUSL, which studied the problem and appointed a Drafting Committee to propose to the states a uniform law aimed at ensuring that healthcare professionals and their sponsoring organizations do not have reciprocal licensing problems; that volunteers and entities have protection from liability claims; and that volunteers have a source of benefits for injuries and illness incurred while performing volunteer services in a host state. UEVHPA, passed by NCCUSL in July 2007, is a thoughtful and comprehensive uniform legislative proposal. We will encourage states to consider and enact UEVHPA including Alternative A, which contains better liability protection.





While UEVHPA is a vital step forward in meeting the problem of ensuring an adequate force of health professionals to respond to a disaster like Katrina, the Uniform Act deals only with the volunteer services of healthcare practitioners. A catastrophic disaster in any state on the magnitude of Katrina or greater will require the need for hundreds of thousands of volunteers for law enforcement, emergency medical, fire and safety protection; preservation or repair and replacement of state infrastructures (e.g., schools, highways, and bridges); and the provision of legal, mental health, and spiritual services and support. The requirement to meet this much greater need is why we also support the expansion and strengthening of existing Good Samaritan Laws to protect these other volunteers and their sponsoring entities during such emergencies.

Our organizations stand ready to provide whatever help and assistance may be needed to ensure that state governments can meet any future challenge for volunteer services for its citizens. States cannot wait for the next major disaster before dealing with these vital issues.

We thank you for the opportunity to collectively express our support in this vital area of public policy.

THIS LETTER HAS BEEN APPROVED BY:

- American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
- American College of Emergency Physicians
- American College of Nurse-Midwives
- American Public Health Association
- American Nurses Association
- American Red Cross
- American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
- Center for Biosecurity of the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center
- Colorado Public Health Association
- Community Health Planning and Policy Development Section, APHA
- Health Equity Associates, LLC
- Kentucky Public Health Association
- Montana Public Health Association
- National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians
- National Association of County & City Health Officials
- National Association of State EMS Officials
- National Funeral Directors Association
- New York State Public Health Association
- North Dakota Public Health Association
- Pennsylvania Public Health Association
- Public Health Association of New York City
- Public Entity Risk Institute
- Trust for America's Health
- Tulsa City-County Health Department
- United Way of America
- Wisconsin Public Health Association