

The New Homeland Security for Children Act

By Michael Prasad, MA, CEM, Chair, IAEM-USA's Children and Disaster Caucus

On June 6, 2022, President Biden signed into law House Resolution 4426, the “Homeland Security for Children Act” (HSCA), which was sponsored by U.S. Representatives Donald Payne, Jr. (D-NJ-10). The HSCA codifies what has been more than five years of work to formally recognize and sustain the work that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has done to “[ensure that the needs of children are considered in homeland security planning](#).” The law takes a wider approach and requires each Department of Homeland Security (DHS) office and component to “take into account the needs of children, including children within underserved communities, in mission planning and execution. DHS must require each office and component to seek advice and feedback from organizations representing the needs of children” ([Congress.gov](#)).

The bill also specifically directs FEMA to “identify and integrate the needs of children into activities to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate against the risk of natural disasters, acts of terrorism, and other disasters,” which they have been doing off-and-on since 2009, depending on the different presidential administrations and FEMA administrators. There has been a technical expert coordinating such integration for at least 10 years, but the position was never codified until now.

Also as part of the HSCA is the ability for this technical expert to “consult with relevant outside organizations and experts, to coordinate such integration, as necessary” ([Congress.gov](#)). That is where the IAEM-USA's Children and Disaster

group comes in. As a group, we have been reviewing, commenting, and advocating for children's concerns and unique issues since our inception as a caucus. The disaster needs of children and families with children are many—and unfortunately, many times overlooked or underserved by emergency managers and governments across the country. There is a multitude of issues – from pediatric surgeon mass casualty incidents, to restoration of childcare services after a major disaster, to the repatriation of unaccompanied minors—which each present distinctive differences for preparedness/protection/prevention, response, recovery, and mitigation actions and missions through emergency management. Children's issues in disaster [run the gamut](#) of emergency support functions, recovery support functions, and community lifelines. And FEMA has already been working on these issues, way before this new HSCA was introduced. Going back to the Kids in Disasters Wellbeing, Safety, and Health Act of 2007 and the [National Commission on Children and Disasters](#) (published in 2010), FEMA has been methodically collecting and consolidating the work done at the federal level, in support of children and disaster needs.

The Children and Disaster Caucus has formed a special task force and has restarted discussions with FEMA, both in support of the HSCA and to review and comment on the work that FEMA has already done. With the advice and consent of the IAEM-USA Board of Directors, the Children and Disaster Caucus will continue our dialogue with FEMA (who will also represent other DHS offices and components in this endeavor) on these major categories

of government-led work including disaster management and recovery, mental health, child physical health and trauma, emergency medical services and pediatric transport, disaster case management, child care and early education, elementary and secondary education, child welfare and juvenile justice, sheltering standards, services and supplies, housing, and evacuation and reunification. This work will crosswalk with other IAEM-USA groups; to whom the Children and Disaster Caucus will liaise regularly. We have already posted content to the new [IAEMConnect](#) internal social media site about [emergency medical services and pediatric transport](#), which was produced by the task force. Upcoming next, is the advocacy work on [pediatric \(infant/toddler\) mass care feeding concerns](#), which will cross the child physical health and trauma, sheltering standards, and services and supplies categories. The major concern here is that federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial emergency managers are only planning for (and logistically supporting) at best infant formula as the only solution for breastfeeding mothers who have issues during the disaster. This switch can be medically less healthy for the baby and will have long-term negative financial impacts on the families, many of whom are socially vulnerable, even before the disaster. This singular issue can be solved through the standard emergency management paradigm of different planning, organization, equipment, training, and exercising.

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Mom's Emotional Thank You

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fortune when Madeline, and four of her classmates, were held hostage nine years prior. Deanna recalled that Shelby County Deputy Sheriff Morrow and Chelsea Middle School Principal Bill Harper ran immediately to confront the kidnapper and secure their freedom.

Deanna got out her thank you cards and wrote Deputy Morrow a handwritten note with an emotional – and heartfelt – message of sincere thanks and an update on Madeline's educational achievement and dreams for a bright future: "After watching how the Uvalde tragedy unfolded - - I wanted you to know how thankful I am that you did not hesitate to run into that locker room for those girls. I wanted you to see that scared 13-year-old turned into an incredible young lady who is living her life to the fullest. Thank you for thinking of her first on that scary day. You are always in my prayers."

It's important to note that law enforcement officers use their de-escalation and negotiation skills to

reduce danger far more often than using that less lethal or deadly force options. This flexibility requires comprehensive and ongoing training, education, practical drills and skills development, and scenario-based practice on a regular basis. It's also important to note that generally officers with years or even decades of experience have better and safer conflict resolution success.

Chelsea Middle School Incident Aftermath

It was fortunate that the incident happened on a Tuesday since it gave school staff the opportunity to provide professional counseling services to everyone impacted. As time and school activities continues, emotions gradually diminished as people sought to move past the trauma. The National Sheriff's Association awarded Deputy David Morrow with the Medal of Valor citing his "outstanding personal bravery, intelligently performed, in the line of duty at imminent personal hazard of life." The Alabama Association of School Resource Officers also recognized their actions and awarded Harper and Morrow with the Valor Award.

The suspect (the authors' policy is not to mention his name and provide him any notoriety) was found to be mentally unable to stand trial. He was sentenced to a maximum-security medical facility until it is determined he "no longer poses a real or substantial threat to himself or others."

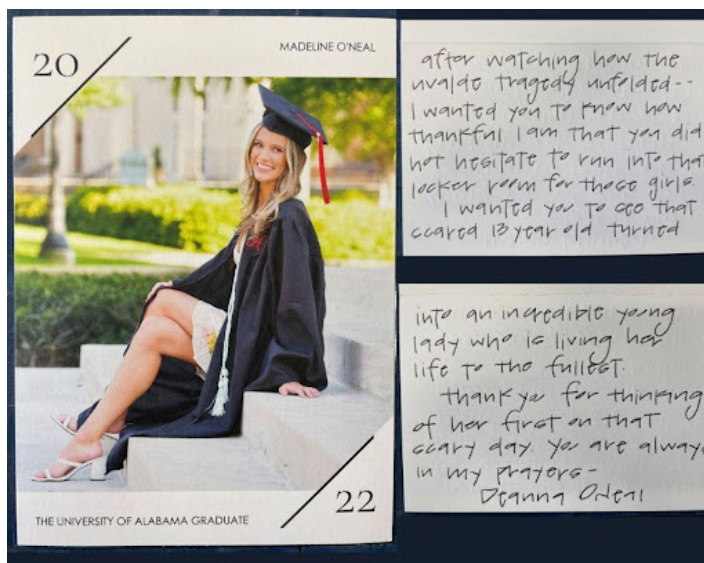
Post-Incident Acknowledgements and Updates

Shelby County Schools Superintendent Randy Fuller, who managed the school's response and recovery, retired in 2018 after a 42-year educational career including 12 years as superintendent. Shelby County Sheriff Chris Curry, who commanded the law enforcement response, retired two years later after a distinguished 35-year career, including 12 years as sheriff. Principal Bill Harper retired in 2014 after a lengthy educational career. Shelby County Deputy Sheriff David Morrow continues "to protect and to service" Shelby County citizens. ◆

Homeland Security for Children

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IAEM-USA members who are interested in helping shape and refine our nation's policies, procedures, training, and promulgation of these issues impacting our children are encouraged to view the progress of this task force on the [IAEMConnect's Children and Disaster Caucus Community](#), and are also welcome to join the IAEM-USA Children and Disaster Caucus itself. Details about the caucus can be found at the Children and Disaster Caucus site on the [IAEM website](#). ◆



The thank you note to the Deputy Morrow from a grateful Mother.