



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH

PO Box 47990 • Olympia, Washington 98504-7990

January 21, 2009

The Honorable Christopher Hurst, Chair
House Committee on Public Safety & Emergency Preparedness
John L. O'Brien Building
Room JLOB 206-A
Post Office Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

Dear Representative Hurst:

I am writing as chair of the Washington State Board of Health to suggest possible amendments to House Bill 1157, which is to be heard by your committee today. The bill would establish a workgroup, led by the adjutant general, to study and provide recommendations for improving the delivery of emergency information to the public.

The bill lists a number of specific issues that the workgroup is required to address such as how to use a variety of communication modes to improve the dissemination of messages to the public. If this workgroup is established in statute, we believe it should be explicitly charged with considering outreach to vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations, such as populations with limited English proficiency. The tragic deaths from carbon monoxide poisoning following the 2006 windstorms in western Washington provide an example of the disproportionate impact emergencies often have on vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations. Therefore, the Board suggests the workgroup's tasks include a review of the impact of emergency alert system delivery mechanisms on our most vulnerable residents and its final report should include recommendations on how to improve the emergency information system to promote safety for all of Washington's diverse communities.

The bill also specifies that the workgroup should include representatives from a number of specific emergency organizations and other key stakeholder groups. The Board recommends that a representative from the Department of Health be included in this list. Public health plays a vital role in responding to emergencies, such as ensuring the quality of the public's water supply in the event of a flood, providing messages about the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning during windstorms and other power outages, and responding to true public health

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emergencies such as bioterrorist attacks or pandemic influenza. Therefore, the Board encourages the inclusion of public health on the adjutant general's workgroup.

Thank you for considering this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Treuman Katz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Treuman Katz

Chair

cc: House Committee on Public Safety & Emergency Preparedness Members
The Honorable Jeff Morris, Washington State House of Representatives
State Board of Health Members
Ms. Christina Hulet, Governor's Executive Policy Office
Mr. Jonathan Seib, Governor's Executive Policy Office
Mr. Brian Peyton, Department of Health
Mr. Craig McLaughlin, State Board of Health