

Testimony Before the Appropriations Committee

Wednesday, February 23rd

By Mike Winkler, 1st Vice-President, A&R, Local 4200 AFT-CT

I am here this evening to ask for a separate budget and a separate agency for the Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security. I'll explain why merging this Department with the Department of Public Safety will negatively impact civil preparedness.

The current Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security already has a first-responder and a pro-uniform bias. Placing Homeland Security in the Department of Public Safety with the State Police would intensify this bias.

What's wrong with a first-responder pro-uniform bias? The proper response by the State to a widespread catastrophe is not to arrive on scene as first responders are experienced in doing. The proper state response to a statewide emergency is to manage a widespread crisis through a planned marshalling and application of critical statewide resources. This is a regional planned bureaucratic response, not part of a first responder's expertise.

Currently, the Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security is a place for retired fire or police chiefs to go to pull down a sizable salary while collecting their municipal pensions. As long as there is no serious disaster, the problem of having former uniformed first responders in charge of your disaster planning will not be apparent.

But the Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security needs to empower a new breed of analysts, planners and managers who can perform and utilize sophisticated analyses of transportation systems under stress, transmission patterns in a pandemic, the best choices to make when facing an overwhelming problem with limited medical and other resources. Handling a widespread disaster is absolutely nothing like calling in a second company to help put out a two-alarm fire.

Our experience is that uniformed first responders have little respect for analysts and planners. The uniform is everything in a "line" organization. Placing the Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security in the Department of Public Safety strongly reinforces a bias that is already having a negative impact on our civil preparedness.