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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES
Public Health

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May 9, 2005

Hattie Rees Hanley, MPP, Project Manager
State of California
Little Hoover Commission
925 L Street, Suite 805
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Ms. Hanley,

In our discussions about the Little Hoover Commission's review of preparedness in California, you asked that I write you with my observations regarding changes I have observed in California Department of Health Services in the last year.

In working with our State colleagues this year, it is my perception that things have improved significantly with Dr. Jackson's appointment and his selection of key leadership positions to advance public health preparedness at State level. The major areas we have seen improvements are in on-going close communications with state counterparts on the bioterrorism grants from CDC and HRSA; the commencement of a public health emergency strategic planning effort; coordination with us on the plans for receipt, storage and staging of the Strategic National Stockpile; collaboration on up grades of public health laboratories here and in Richmond; active development of shared materials for emergency risk communications; and joint efforts in training and in regional preparedness.

You also asked that I comment on areas of continuing concern. I have two: information technology capacities for real time management of a public health emergency; and critical staffing issues. These concerns are acute here in Los Angeles as well as at the State level. Existing state alerting and notification systems have improved but do not provide the capability to take in a wide array of data to assist in managing the emergency. With regard to personnel, we share with the state an aging public health professional work force with many key disciplines facing significant retirement outflows and with replacements difficult to find due to inadequate salary structures and personnel classifications not representative of present preparedness needs. The disciplines of epidemiology, microbiology, health education and public health nursing are particularly threatened.

I hope this information is helpful. Please call if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH
Director of Public Health and Health Officer

JEF:SG:ia
Sharon/Memo/Hanley