



**STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AND HOMELAND SECURITY**



March 1, 2007

Dear Chief Elected Official and Emergency Management Director:

The Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS) in conjunction with a number of state and local partners, has developed draft guidelines for municipalities and tribal nations to use in developing and reviewing plans for their local disaster relief shelters.

These draft guidelines introduce and promote the concept of “universally accessible disaster relief shelters,” which are congregate public shelters that are planned, equipped and operated to meet the sheltering needs of a wide variety of community members, including most people with disabilities and older adults. The goal is to ensure that disaster relief shelters in Connecticut are accessible and usable by all community members who normally live independently so that, wherever possible, families and neighbors can shelter together, and the need for “special” transportation and sheltering arrangements is reduced.

There are three key points to keep in mind as you review and comment on the draft guidelines:

- First, a universally accessible disaster relief shelter is not a medical shelter. Persons with medical conditions that require skilled care or frequent personal assistance from shelter staff should be sheltered in a medical facility or designated shelter that is equipped and staffed to meet their medical needs.
- Second, the American Red Cross has recently revised its Disaster Services Program Guidance in such a way that now allows local Red Cross Chapters to accommodate the universal shelter access guidelines.
- Third, it is recognized that not every community will be able to identify and establish universally accessible disaster relief shelters overnight. For those that cannot immediately identify appropriate facilities, we hope these guidelines will serve as a useful starting point for planning and for initiating discussions with local disability and aging advocacy groups.

We are asking you to review the draft guidelines and accompanying documents and return your comments to DEMHS by March 23, 2007. They can be found on the DEMHS web site, located at www.ct.gov/demhs under “Latest News.” To view and/or download these documents, please go directly to <http://www.ct.gov/demhs/cwp/view.asp?a=1911&q=332624>.

The documents available for your review and comments include:

- Draft Guidelines for Municipalities
- Space and Floor Plan Considerations
- Emergency Shelter Accessibility Checklist
- Aging Disability and Substance Abuse Recover Resources, and
- List of Senior Citizen Center contacts

Please submit your comments electronically to Ms. Melanie Kerr, Project Manager for DEMHS. Ms. Kerr can be reached at Melanie.Kerr@ct.gov.

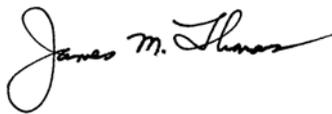
We would like to thank the ad hoc intergovernmental working group for their hard work over the last eight months in developing this guidance. The working group included representation from:

- √ Community-based advocates for persons with disabilities;
- √ Local Emergency Management Directors;
- √ Local first responders;
- √ The American Red Cross;
- √ Regional emergency management planners;
- √ State Departments of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, Mental Health and Addiction Services, Public Health, and Social Services;
- √ State Office of Protection and Advocacy; and,
- √ University of Connecticut Center on Disabilities.

We look forward to receiving your feedback and comments on these draft guidelines. If you have questions and need to contact Ms. Kerr by telephone, she can be reached at 860-256-0814.

Thank you.

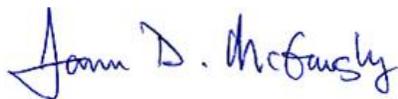
Sincerely,



James M. Thomas, Commissioner
Emergency Management & Homeland Security



J. Robert Galvin, M.D., MPH
Commissioner
Department of Public Health



James McGaughey, Executive Director
Office of Protection and Advocacy



Michael Starkowski
Commissioner Designee
Department of Social Services