

**Press Statement for Chairperson Mark Shriver  
National Commission on Children and Disasters  
Commission Field Visit – Cedar Rapids, IA  
January 6, 2010**

Thank you for coming.

I am Mark Shriver, Chairperson of the National Commission on Children and Disasters and Vice-President and Managing Director for U.S. Programs at Save the Children.

I would like to recognize my fellow Commissioners joining me today:

The Honorable Sheila Leslie, a Member of the Nevada General Assembly and the Specialty Courts Coordinator for the 2nd Judicial District Court, where she oversees the criminal, family and juvenile drug courts and the state's first mental health court.

Dr. David Schonfeld, Director of the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement, Cincinnati Children's

Hospital Medical Center. Dr. Schonfeld is also a member of the Disaster Mental Health Subcommittee of the National Biodefense Science Board Federal Advisory Committee and the American Academy of Pediatrics Disaster Preparedness Advisory Council.

We extend our gratitude to

Administrator David Miller of the Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management Division; and

Lieutenant General Ron Dardis, Executive Director of Rebuild Iowa.

for joining us.

-----

While disasters have a profound effect on everyone in the community, they are particularly traumatic and disruptive for children, especially when you consider their health, mental health, education and socialization needs.

Children are not simply “small adults.”

They have unique needs that for too long have been overlooked and unmet.

Nearly 25% of the population in our country, and here in Iowa, are children 18 years and under.

It is appalling that there are more requirements to include dogs and cats in disaster plans than there are requirements for children.

When it comes to meeting the long-term recovery needs of children, there is simply no national, state or local framework to guide us.

Congress created the National Commission on Children and Disasters to end this culture of “benign neglect” and make children more of a priority in disaster preparedness, response and recovery.

Iowans can be proud of Senator Tom Harkin for including funds in the Federal budget to support the work of the Commission.

-----

We’ve come to Cedar Rapids to focus on the recovery efforts from the 2008 tornadoes and floods.

But recovery isn't just about rebuilding roads and bridges, it's about restoring lives.

In its Interim Report to the President and Congress, which was delivered this past October and is available on our website, the Commission specified common-sense principles for restoring the lives of children in the aftermath of a disaster.

These principles include:

- The immediate availability and continuity of disaster case management services to families;
- Continuous access to a the full spectrum of pediatric medical services, including a medical home, pediatric specialty services and children's hospitals;
- Access to appropriate crisis, bereavement and mental health services;

- Academic continuity and immediate educational access by enrolling and placing disaster-affected children in educational and related services;
- Priority for families with children for disaster housing assistance and expedited transition into permanent housing, especially for those families with children who have disabilities or special health, mental health or educational needs; and
- The provision of child care and developmental and age-appropriate play and recreation options, particularly after-school services.

All phases of disaster planning and management are a shared responsibility.

We want children emphasized as critical components of Federal, state and local disaster plans, including the roles of

systems responsible for the education, care and welfare of children.

We want Iowa and every state to require schools, and child care and child welfare providers to have basic written emergency plans in place addressing evacuation, reunification and measures to accommodate children with disabilities and chronic health needs.

-----

Make no mistake, there will be future disasters.

The experiences of Iowans are important to our work as we look to shape practical recommendations for President Obama and Congress.

We want to know if Federal and state policies are encouraging recovery efforts for children and families. We

want to share these best practices. But we also recognize that persistent problems still exist. And the Commission is willing to work with the President and Congress, Governors and State Legislators to find solutions.

All Americans, especially children, who make up nearly 25% of our population, deserve no less than a disaster recovery system that is rapid and responsive to their needs.

All of us in a position to improve the status quo must take action. We owe it to our families and our neighbors, and certainly to the nation's 73 million children and the 720,000 children in Iowa.

Thank you again for joining us.

At this point I invite Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management Division Administrator David Miller to make some brief comments.



David....

I would now invite Lt. General Dardis Executive Director of Rebuild Iowa to make his comments.

Lt General Dardis, ...

Finally, we are very fortunate to be joined by Amanda Smestad and her daughters Kaleigh and Rhaelynn to tell us about the impact of the flood on their family.

Amanda...

At this point, we welcome your questions...