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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Emergency Management Director Jonathan Lord addresses the Florida House Select Committee on hurricane resiliency, recovery

October 17, 2023 – Flagler County Emergency Management Director Jonathan Lord was invited to address the Florida House Select Committee Monday (October 16) for the second time this year about hurricane resiliency and recovery as part of a panel discussion that also included representatives from Lee, Charlotte, Collier, and Volusia counties. All five counties suffered impacts from either or both Hurricane Ian and Hurricane Nicole and the committee wanted an update about how all the counties are faring in the aftermath of Hurricane Idalia.

“A lot has happened since I had the pleasure of speaking with you in January, and many of the programs that were authorized by the legislature and implemented this year have had a significant positive impact on communities throughout our state,” Lord said. “Therefore, on Flagler County’s behalf, let me say thank you, for what you, the senate, our governor, and state agencies have done to not only support our communities getting back on their feet, but in many cases providing us with the opportunity, through funding assistance, to make us more resilient.”

Lord outlined the recovery progress for Flagler County – much of which could not have been accomplished without financial support such as Senate Bill 4-A, a FEMA Public Assistance Match Waiver program, and the \$350 Million Hurricane Ian and Nicole Grant Recovery program. He also offered suggestions for helpful measures that the Florida House can consider supporting in the upcoming legislative session.

“You also provided over \$100 million to the Department of Environmental Protection for beach recovery and renourishment. For coastal communities like ours, this has been and continues to be one of our greatest concerns related to not only hurricanes, but other coastal storms such as strong Nor’easters,” Lord said. “Our beaches, and the dunes or berm systems built upon them, are not just for tourism and recreation purposes. The funding of comprehensive beach management plans and projects that restore and even help improve the protective barriers on our coastline are key to protecting infrastructure, property, lives, and our economies.”

Lord emphasized the money “was a generous start” and urged the committee to continue to make it a priority in the coming year.

Andy Dance
District 1

Greg Hansen
District 2

David Sullivan
District 3

Leann Pennington
District 4

Donald O’Brien, Jr.
District 5

“Specifically in Flagler County, we are looking at an over \$27 million funding shortfall when it comes to related projects,” he said.

Lord praised the “My Safe Florida Home” program that provided an additional \$50 million that allows residents to strengthen their homes in terms of wind mitigation and can garner them mandatory insurance discounts.

“I would also like to take this opportunity to share some related items for your consideration this year,” Lord said. “These are all programs that build upon the great foundation started last year by the legislature.”

Lord asked the Florida House Select Committee for the following:

- Emergency Management Preparedness Assistance and Trust Fund – increase what is provided to all counties for planning, training, personnel costs, equipment, and Emergency Management operations which was set at \$105,806 in 2002 and has been unchanged for 20 years.
- Create a similar program to the State Chief Financial Officer’s “My Safe Florida Home” program that would be flood-centric instead of addressing wind mitigation.
- Build on the FEMA mitigation program that allows homeowners in flood prone areas to either elevate their homes or potentially sell them to local governmental agencies to be returned to open space that can possibly absorb floodwaters to protect neighboring structures, with the request being to shift the grant and project management from local government to the Florida Division of Emergency Management, using federal funds, to prevent burdening local taxpayers with managerial expenses for the grants.
- Prioritize disaster sheltering options – other than local schools – for growing counties with demographic profiles that do not support adding to the inventory of schools. Also support plans that reflect county boundaries rather than regional boundaries.

“While I have focused my time today on how your programs have made counties like Flagler County more resilient – and what gaps we are still facing – I also want to highlight that when you build up and make one community more resilient, that also impacts other communities across the state,” Lord said. “This was made evident by the fact that many of the counties most impacted by last year’s hurricanes, and the legislature’s related programs, provided direct support to the Big-Bend counties impacted by the recent Hurricane Idalia, some of those counties are in the room today.”

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