EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pursuant to section 252.385, Florida Statutes, the Division of Emergency Management (Division) annually publishes a shelter retrofit report which provides a list of facilities to be retrofitted for use as public hurricane evacuation shelters. Retrofitting is the modification of an existing structure to make it stronger and more disaster resistant. An example would be the installation of hurricane shutters on an existing building to protect doors and windows from wind-borne debris. Such measures bring the safety of public shelters up to established safety criteria and increase the availability of public hurricane evacuation shelter spaces in the State of Florida.

Since 1999 significant progress has been made toward reducing the deficit of safe public hurricane shelter space and meeting the American Red Cross’s Standards for Hurricane Evacuation Shelter Selection (ARC 4496, January 2002). A total of 954,746 hurricane shelter spaces have been created through a combination of surveys, retrofitting and application of enhanced hurricane design and construction standards. Another 15,888 spaces (meeting ARC 4496 safety standards) are estimated to be available to the public by August 2014.

In preparation of the 2013 Shelter Retrofit Report, the Division reviewed a total of 509 projects submitted by county emergency management agencies in collaboration with other partner organizations (local American Red Cross chapters and school boards) that participate in hurricane shelter planning and operations. After careful evaluation of the proposed projects, the Division, by priority, recommends 169 projects for retrofitting. These projects alone will create an additional 87,150 ARC 4496 hurricane shelter spaces statewide at an estimated cost of $12,745,072.

An increase in public hurricane shelter capacity has been achieved over the past 13 years. This is largely due to the availability of retrofit and mitigation-related dollars to fund these projects. Prior to 1999, the State lacked a dedicated funding source to meet the demands for public shelter space. Since 1999, however, the Governor and the Legislature have committed at least $3 million annually to the State’s retrofit program. Per section 215.559(1)(b), Florida Statutes, the Division is provided $3 million per year to retrofit hurricane shelters as prioritized in the published Shelter Retrofit Reports. The Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) has also provided approximately $38 million to harden or retrofit public hurricane shelters. Table 1.1 summarizes the State’s progress in creating needed public hurricane shelter space through retrofit of appropriate buildings.
The Division’s public hurricane shelter deficit reduction strategy focuses on five major components: 1) surveying hurricane shelter facilities in existing local inventories to identify unused space; 2) surveying facilities not currently listed in local inventories to identify additional capacity; 3) providing funding for cost-effective retrofit or other mitigation measures on existing buildings that can provide additional shelter capacity; 4) incorporating hurricane shelter design criteria into new public building construction projects; and 5) reducing hurricane shelter demand through improved public information, education and behavioral analysis, and decreased evacuation need.

A very critical component of the strategy to increase the availability of “safe” hurricane shelter space is construction of new school facilities to comply with the Enhanced Hurricane Protection Area (EHPA) requirements. Through construction of EHPA facilities, 499,948 (See Table 2.1) hurricane shelter spaces have been added to the state’s inventory since 1995.

Since 1995 the State has made significant progress toward improving the safety and availability of public hurricane shelter space. On a statewide cumulative basis, the current capacity is about 16 percent greater than the 2013 estimated demand; per the 2012 Statewide Emergency Shelter Plan. This has been accomplished through a comprehensive strategy of surveys, retrofitting of existing buildings, new construction and demand-reduction components. At the time of completion of the 2012 Statewide Emergency Shelter Plan, Florida had 37 counties with a demonstrable surplus of public hurricane shelter spaces. The State and local efforts and commitment to reduce the shelter deficit resulted in all but three of the State’s Regional Planning Council (RPC) regions reporting shelter surplus capacity at this time. The three RPC regions with a current deficit per the 2012 Statewide Emergency Shelter Plan are regions 4, 5, and 9. As existing buildings constructed to older building codes continue to age, replacement facilities, such as new construction or retrofit of recently constructed facilities, will be needed to ensure that state shelter capacities meet both current and future needs.

In sum, as the number of Floridians in areas vulnerable to hurricanes continues to grow, it is vitally important that construction of hurricane shelters and retrofitting of existing buildings continue. Full implementation of the Division’s shelter deficit reduction strategy will create a greater level of preparedness, a more efficient capability for responding to incidents and an increased ability to meet the needs of disaster survivors.