

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 14, 2025

The Honorable Joseph Cuffari
Inspector General
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Office of Inspector General
245 Murray Lane SW
Washington, D.C., 20528

Dear Inspector General Cuffari:

We write with continued alarm regarding ongoing retaliation by the Trump Administration against federal employees at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) who exercised their legal right to make protected whistleblower disclosures.

On August 25, 2025, more than 190 FEMA employees made a protected whistleblower disclosure to Congress, called the Katrina Declaration, detailing various serious ways in which Trump Administration officials are putting lives at risk by undermining FEMA's ability to perform disaster response and recovery.¹ On September 17, 2025, our Committees sent a letter to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and FEMA expressing urgent concern that all public signers of the Katrina Declaration were placed on indefinite administrative leave without valid cause.² Their disclosure to Congress is protected under federal whistleblower laws.³ Furthermore, these employees have a first amendment right to publicly express their views, including in their personal capacity.

According to reports, FEMA has initiated disciplinary investigations against the 34 public signers—an adverse action prohibited under whistleblower statutes.⁴ We are also deeply troubled by reports that these employees were denied adequate time to consult legal counsel prior to investigative interviews—violating principles of due process and fundamental fairness.⁵ Employees have also been pushed to sign non-disclosure agreements ahead of interviews with

¹ Stand Up for Science, *The Katrina Declaration* (Aug. 25, 2025) (online at www.standupforscience.net/fema-katrina-declaration).

² Letter from Ranking Member Rick Larsen, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, et al. to Secretary Kristi Noem, Department of Homeland Security (Sept. 17, 2025) (online at http://democrats-transportation.house.gov/imo/media/doc/fema_whistleblower_letter_final.pdf).

³ 5 U.S.C. 2302(b)(8)-(9), Pub. L. No. 101-12 as amended.

⁴ CNN, *Trump administration launches investigation into FEMA workers who warned disaster agency was at risk* (Sept. 23, 2025) (online at www.cnn.com/2025/09/23/politics/fema-investigating-workers-non-disclosure-agreement).

⁵ *Id.*

investigators, which raises further concerns that FEMA is attempting to undercut whistleblower protections.⁶

FEMA leadership's punitive response against courageous whistleblowers sends a chilling message to other federal employees and undermines the integrity of whistleblower protection. Actions silencing whistleblowers fosters an environment that discourages employees from reporting malfeasance within the federal government. Whistleblower protection laws are essential to government accountability and the prevention of corruption. Ultimately, when whistleblowers are supported and their concerns are taken seriously, FEMA will be better prepared to meet its essential mission.

As we continue our investigation, we request that the DHS Office of Inspector General launch a formal investigation into this apparent case of whistleblower intimidation and retaliation. Please provide a response no later than October 28, 2025, confirming whether your office will undertake such engagement.

We look forward to your prompt response. If you have any questions, please contact Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Democratic staff at (202) 226-8776, Oversight and Government Reform Committee Democratic staff at (202) 225-5051, and Homeland Security Committee Democratic staff at (202) 226-2616.

Sincerely,



Rick Larsen
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure



Greg Stanton
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Public Buildings,
Economic Development, and
Emergency Management

⁶ *Id.*



Robert Garcia
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and
Government Reform



Bennie Thompson
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security

cc: Chairman Sam Graves, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Chairman James Comer, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Chairman Andrew Garbarino, Committee on Homeland Security

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 14, 2025

Mr. David Richardson
Senior Official Performing the Duties of Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street SW
Washington, D.C., 20472

Dear Mr. Richardson:

We write with continued alarm regarding ongoing retaliation by the Trump Administration against federal employees at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) who exercised their legal right to make protected whistleblower disclosures.

On August 25, 2025, more than 190 FEMA employees made a protected whistleblower disclosure to Congress, called the Katrina Declaration, detailing various serious ways in which Trump Administration officials are putting lives at risk by undermining FEMA's ability to perform disaster response and recovery.¹ On September 17, 2025, our Committees wrote you expressing urgent concern that all public signers of the Katrina Declaration were placed on indefinite administrative leave without valid cause.² Their disclosure to Congress is protected under federal whistleblower laws.³ Furthermore, these employees have a first amendment right to publicly express their views, including in their personal capacity.

According to reports, FEMA has initiated disciplinary investigations against the 34 public signers—an adverse action prohibited under whistleblower statutes.⁴ We are also deeply troubled by reports that these employees were denied adequate time to consult legal counsel prior to investigative interviews—violating principles of due process and fundamental fairness.⁵ Employees have also been pushed to sign non-disclosure agreements ahead of interviews with investigators, which raises further concerns that FEMA is attempting to undercut whistleblower protections.⁶

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⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

Your punitive response against courageous whistleblowers sends a chilling message to other federal employees and undermines the integrity of whistleblower protections. Actions silencing whistleblowers fosters an environment that discourages employees from reporting malfeasance within the federal government. Whistleblower protection laws are essential to government accountability and the prevention of corruption. Ultimately, when whistleblowers are supported and their concerns are taken seriously, FEMA will be better prepared to meet its essential mission.

As we continue our investigation, we reiterate our request for your written response to our September 17, 2025, letter.⁷ We urge you to immediately cease retaliatory actions and to reinstate the affected employees to their regular status. Please also provide a response no later than October 28, 2025, explaining the basis on which you are conducting investigations of such employees. We have separately requested the DHS Office of Inspector General to launch a formal investigation into this apparent case of whistleblower intimidation and retaliation.

We look forward to your prompt response. If you have any questions, please contact Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Democratic staff at (202) 226-8776, Oversight and Government Reform Committee Democratic staff at (202) 225-5051, and Homeland Security Committee Democratic staff at (202)226-2616.

Sincerely,



Rick Larsen
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure



Greg Stanton
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Public Buildings,
Economic Development, and
Emergency Management

⁷ Letter from Ranking Member Rick Larsen, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, et al. to Secretary Kristi Noem, Department of Homeland Security (Sept. 17, 2025) (online at http://democrats-transportation.house.gov/imo/media/doc/fema_whistleblower_letter_final.pdf). The Federal Emergency Management Agency and Department of Homeland Security have failed to provide a response by the Committees' October 1, 2025, deadline.



Robert Garcia
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and
Government Reform



Bennie Thompson
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security

cc: Secretary Kristi Noem, Department of Homeland Security
Chairman Sam Graves, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Chairman James Comer, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Chairman Andrew Garbarino, Committee on Homeland Security