

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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July 11, 2025

Ms. Laura Grimm
Chief of Staff Performing the Duties of Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and
Atmosphere and NOAA Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Ms. Grimm:

We urgently request answers from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) about the catastrophic flash flood event that struck Central Texas over the July 4th holiday weekend. This disaster has led to an unprecedented loss of life, with the death toll currently exceeding 100, including at least 30 children, and search efforts continuing for those still missing.¹

Current reports show that the flash flooding began in the early morning of Friday, July 4, with the Guadalupe River more than doubling in height within about 90 minutes.² While NWS did issue several flood warning alerts, including one indicating “a large and deadly flood wave” at 5:34 am Friday that urged residents and campers in Kerr County to seek higher ground, there are concerns about the effectiveness of those warnings.³ Reports suggest that some residents may not have received these messages and others did not fully grasp the seriousness of the flood.⁴

NWS sent out flash flood warnings triggering automatic alerts to cell phones and weather radios in the Kerr County area. The county also uses a CodeRED system, which requires residents to enroll in order to receive emergency alerts. Kerrville’s Mayor, Joe Herring, told reporters that he received a single flash flood alert from the CodeRED system at 6:00 am, but

¹ *Death Toll Reaches at Least 119 in Texas Floods, With 173 Missing*, New York Times (July 9, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/2025/07/09/us/texas-floods-missing-search.html).

² *See When Federal and Local Officials Issued Warnings About the Texas Floods*, New York Times (July 8, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/07/08/weather/texas-floods-timeline-weather-alerts.html).

³ *Weather Warnings Gave Officials a 3 Hour, 21 Minute Window to Save Lives in Kerr County. What Happened Then Remains Unclear*, Texas Tribune (July 8, 2025) (online at www.texastribune.org/2025/07/08/texas-weather-service-warning-kerr-county/).

⁴ *Officials Feared Flood Risk to Youth Camps But Rejected Warning System*, New York Times (July 6, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/2025/07/06/us/texas-flood-warnings-sirens.html).

that he did not receive any similar notice directly from NWS.⁵ Some residents reported receiving no alerts whatsoever.⁶ While numerous external factors, including lack of data or cellphone service coverage or the early hours during which the disaster occurred, may have hindered communication, the apparent breakdown in communication between alert originators and residents—and the appalling scale of the tragedy—must raise questions about the effectiveness of natural disaster alerting systems.⁷

While many facts are still unclear in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, we are also concerned about NOAA and NWS' ability to monitor risks in the future and to effectively alert communities to potential disasters in order to save lives given the severe staffing and funding shortages the agency faces. Rather than working to make NWS stronger and more effective, the Trump Administration and Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) have focused on staffing and resource cuts that risk seriously jeopardizing NOAA and NWS' capacity. Arbitrary cuts to vital services like NWS hurt emergency preparedness and put lives in danger. Starting from an already small baseline number of staff, NWS has lost more than 10% of its workforce since the beginning of the Trump Administration.⁸ Because of these cuts, the agency is preparing for what an internal document has described as "severe shortages" in staffing—particularly at local weather offices, which perform the essential work that keeps weather reports up-to-date and accurate for communities across the country.⁹ As of May 2025, approximately 40% of the NWS's 122 local forecasting offices had staffing gaps, with 30 offices around the country lacking a chief meteorologist.¹⁰ The Trump Administration has confirmed these severe staffing issues, with a government spokesperson stating that "several local NWS offices are temporarily operating below around-the-clock staffing."¹¹

To protect the American people from escalating disaster threats, the NWS needs a stronger staffing posture, not a weaker one. Flooding has been a constant threat in Texas

⁵ *Weather Warnings Gave Officials a 3 Hour, 21 Minute Window to Save Lives in Kerr County. What Happened Then Remains Unclear*, Texas Tribune (July 8, 2025) (online at www.texastribune.org/2025/07/08/texas-weather-service-warning-kerr-county/).

⁶ *Texas Officials Give Few Answers to Growing Questions About Response to Deadly Floods*, NBC News (July 8, 2025) (online at www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/texas-officials-give-answers-growing-questions-response-kerr-county-de-rcna217515).

⁷ *Weather Warnings Gave Officials a 3 Hour, 21 Minute Window to Save Lives in Kerr County. What Happened Then Remains Unclear*, Texas Tribune (July 8, 2025) (online at www.texastribune.org/2025/07/08/texas-weather-service-warning-kerr-county/).

⁸ *The Weather Service Had a Plan to Reinvent Itself. Did DOGE Stop It?*, New York Times (May 15, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/2025/05/15/us/politics/national-weather-service-cuts-trump.html).

⁹ *Weather Service Prepares for 'Degraded Operations' Amid Trump Cuts*, New York Times (Apr. 16, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/2025/04/16/climate/national-weather-service-forecast-doge-trump.html).

¹⁰ *This Tornado Mayhem Is a Warning*, The Atlantic (May 19, 2025) (online at www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2025/05/tornado-weather-alerts-doge-cuts/682847/); *US Weather Forecasting is More Crippled than Previously Known as Hurricane Season Nears*, CNN (May 2, 2025) (online at www.cnn.com/2025/05/02/weather/nws-forecasting-layoffs-trump).

¹¹ *The Weather Service Had a Plan to Reinvent Itself. Did DOGE Stop It?*, New York Times (May 15, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/2025/05/15/us/politics/national-weather-service-cuts-trump.html).

communities, and the Guadalupe River Basin is known as one of the most dangerous areas for flash flooding in the entire country.¹² We know that extreme weather events, including unpredictable flooding, will increase in frequency and intensity.¹³ At the time of the tragic flash flooding in Texas on July 5, 2025, multiple positions at local NWS offices were vacant. In particular, an office that covers some of the impacted region lacked a staff forecaster and a meteorologist in charge.¹⁴ Another nearby office was missing a warning coordination meteorologist and science officer, positions which work with local emergency managers and help warn and evacuate residents.¹⁵ Crucial information is needed to fully assess any impact of these vacancies on the July 2025 tragedy and on future weather disasters that could threaten American lives without the right personnel in place.

The tragic loss of life underscores the urgent need to understand what contributed to this disaster, and how we can better prepare for future disasters. Rigorous oversight is needed not only to provide answers to grieving communities in Central Texas, but also to save lives in future extreme weather events. In order to better understand NOAA and NWS' preparedness for future disasters, we request that the agency provide us with the following information and documents by no later than July 25, 2025:

1. All communications with Texas state and local authorities and emergency personnel regarding the July 2025 flooding in Central Texas;
2. All communications, including all emergency alerts and notifications, issued by NWS regarding the July 2025 flooding in Central Texas;
3. All communications with local media regarding the July 2025 flooding in Central Texas;
4. A detailed and comprehensive explanation for how the Emergency Alert System and the Wireless Emergency Alert System was used regarding the July 2025 flooding in Central Texas;
5. A detailed and comprehensive explanation for how NWS and state and local personnel complied with emergency management policies, procedures, and best practices regarding the July 2025 flooding in Central Texas;

¹² *What to Know about the Central Texas Floods: Death Toll, Map and More*, New York Times (July 7, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/2025/07/07/us/texas-floods-kerr-county.html).

¹³ *The U.S. Faces More Frequent Extreme Weather Events, But Attitudes and Actions Aren't Keeping Up* (July 9, 2025) (online at www.nbcnews.com/science/environment/us-faces-frequent-extreme-weather-events-attitudes-actions-arent-keepi-rcna217780).

¹⁴ *As Floods Hit, Key Roles Were Vacant at Weather Service Offices in Texas*, New York Times (July 5, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/2025/07/05/us/politics/texas-floods-warnings-vacancies.html).

¹⁵ *Trump Says NWS Staffing Levels Didn't Affect Texas Storm Preparedness*, Axios (July 6, 2025) (online at www.axios.com/2025/07/07/trump-nws-texas-flood-warnings-funding-cuts-scrutiny); *As Floods Hit, Key Roles Were Vacant at Weather Service Offices in Texas*, New York Times (July 5, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/2025/07/05/us/politics/texas-floods-warnings-vacancies.html).

6. A detailed and comprehensive account of how many staffers were on duty and at what times, as well as their roles, during the July 2025 flooding in Central Texas, and whether that staffing posture differed from standard procedure;
7. A detailed and comprehensive explanation of who assumed each of the duties of the warning coordination meteorologist in the NWS Austin/San Antonio office, if anyone, and their relevant experience;
8. A detailed and comprehensive explanation for how NWS will ensure adequate staffing, to include 24-hour staffing, at all local NWS offices for the 2025 hurricane season and calendar year;
9. A detailed and comprehensive list of current NWS vacancies the Trump Administration intends to fill, including the responsibilities of each role, the length of the vacancy, whether the vacancy has been subject to a hiring freeze, a description of any efforts by the Trump Administration to fill each vacancy to date, and a description of any planned efforts to fill each vacancy;
10. A detailed and comprehensive plan for how NWS will ensure adequate coordination with state and local authorities and emergency personnel despite the reduced staffing and capacity targets of the Trump Administration;
11. A full accounting of employees who separated or will be separated from federal service at NWS or NOAA as a result of being probationary employees, taking the deferred resignation program (or “Fork in the Road” offer), accepting an early retirement incentive, or as part of a reduction in force, from January 20, 2025, including positions in the NWS Austin/San Antonio Office;
12. Documents and communications between NWS employees and NOAA and/or the Department of Commerce regarding staffing at NWS and its local offices, including any concerns raised by NWS local office staff;
13. A detailed and comprehensive list of the meteorological data, forecasting models, and decision-making processes that inform NWS alerts and recommendations for improving systems in the face of rapid and severe weather events;
14. All documents and communications regarding the role of the National Resilience Strategy in responding to emergencies like the Texas floods and whether the delay in updating the strategy negatively affected coordination and response; and
15. All documents and communications regarding implementing Executive Order 14239, on Achieving Efficiency Through State and Local Preparedness.

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at

Ms. Laura Grimm

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“any time” under House Rule X. If you have any questions about this request, please contact Committee Democratic staff at (202) 225-5051. Thank you for your prompt attention to this request.

Sincerely,



Greg Casar
Member of Congress



Jasmine Crockett
Member of Congress



Robert Garcia
Ranking Member

cc: The Honorable James Comer, Chairman