

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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November 3, 2025

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

Dear Mr. Richardson:

When Americans face natural disasters and large-scale emergencies, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) should be there to provide the lifesaving preparation, response, and recovery support they need. Yet President Donald Trump and his Administration have purged dedicated FEMA workers, shuttered essential FEMA offices and programs, and persistently threatened drastic reorganizations and even the closure of FEMA. A dangerous storm or national emergency will come, and the American people deserve a government that is prepared to respond. To identify and address the dangers of President Trump's catastrophic changes to FEMA before they cost Americans their homes, financial wellbeing, and lives, I demand information about how FEMA plans to fulfill its statutory responsibilities to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters and emergencies moving forward.

As millions of Americans know firsthand, FEMA is a critical safety net for both survivors and State, local, Tribal and Territorial governments. FEMA coordinates with agencies at all levels of government to help survivors receive financial assistance for housing, food, and medical treatments, and works with state and local governments to remove debris, restore public infrastructure, and rebuild utilities.¹ However, since taking office, President Trump and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Kristi Noem have said they plan to reduce or eliminate FEMA and shift disaster response responsibility to the states, with Secretary Kristi Noem telling governors and emergency managers in a May 2025 meeting that "FEMA should no longer exist as it is."² Emergency management leaders, including Trump's own former FEMA

¹ *What Does the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Do, and How Is It Funded?* Brookings (June 18, 2025) (online at www.brookings.edu/articles/what-does-fema-do/).

² *Trump's Plan to Begin 'Phasing Out' FEMA After Hurricane Season Burdens States, Experts Warn*, Associated Press (June 11, 2025) (online at <https://apnews.com/article/fema-hurricane-season-trump-eliminate-state-funding-25fb7714414e17fa51156be7e91a4474>); *Trump Wants States to Handle Disasters. States Aren't Prepared*, NPR (Mar. 21, 2025) (online at www.npr.org/2025/03/21/nx-s1-5327595/trump-order-fema-states-disaster-response).

administrator, have warned that terminating the agency would be “fraught with great risk.”³ Your predecessor as acting FEMA director testified before Congress in May 2025 that “I do not believe it is in the best interest of the American people to eliminate the Federal Emergency Management Agency”—statements which he was fired for the next day.⁴ State and local governments already bear substantial responsibility for responding to disasters, and reducing or eliminating the federal role would remove essential support that states cannot receive elsewhere, including funding, resources, and interagency coordination.⁵

Recent reporting about your tenure at FEMA casts serious doubt on your ability to lead the agency. Earlier this year, you stated you were unaware of the existence of hurricane season—a reference of which any emergency management professional, and especially the FEMA administrator, should have at least basic knowledge.⁶ According to reports, you have also been regularly absent and difficult to reach, which contributed to the delayed deployment of search and rescue teams during the response to the tragic July floods in Kerr County, Texas. Instead of coordinating resources in response to the flooding, you were reportedly on vacation.⁷

This was in addition to your other failures in responding to the Texas floods, including the failure to preposition teams, which also hampered rescue and response efforts. The head of FEMA’s urban search and rescue unit, a longtime FEMA employee and emergency response professional, resigned as a result of the botched response, describing the changes at the agency as causing “chaos” and hurting disaster response efforts.⁸ In the aftermath of the flood, calls from survivors went unanswered after call centers were understaffed for days as a result of Secretary Noem’s failure to simply renew the necessary contracts. Nearly two-thirds of calls to FEMA’s disaster assistance line were not answered, according to reports, with call center employees being laid off even during and in the days after the flooding as their contracts expired.⁹

This incompetence goes right to the top of DHS, where Secretary Noem’s policy that all expenditures over \$100,000 receive her personal approval has caused intentional and preventable delays to distributing critical funds to partners and survivors. This policy is reportedly holding up

³ *Noem’s Vow to ‘Eliminate’ FEMA Raises Alarms*, The Hill (Mar. 28, 2025) (online at <https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/5220996-noem-trump-fema-elimination-concerns/>).

⁴ *Trump’s Acting FEMA Chief Fired a Day After Breaking from the Administration*, CNN (May 8, 2025) (online at www.cnn.com/2025/05/08/politics/fema-administrator-acting-fired-cameron-hamilton).

⁵ *Trump Wants States to Handle Disasters. States Aren’t Prepared*, NPR (Mar. 21, 2025) (online at www.npr.org/2025/03/21/nx-s1-5327595/trump-order-fema-states-disaster-response).

⁶ *Acting FEMA Chief Told Staff He Didn’t Know about U.S. Hurricane Season*, New York Times (June 2, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/2025/06/02/us/politics/fema-david-richardson-hurricane-season.html).

⁷ *As Texas Flooded, Key Staff Say FEMA’s Leader Could Not Be Reached.*, Washington Post (Sept. 24, 2025) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2025/09/24/fema-administrator-david-richardson-texas-floods/).

⁸ *FEMA Urban Search and Rescue Chief Resigns, Citing Agency ‘Chaos’, Colleagues Said*, New York Times (July 22, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/2025/07/22/climate/fema-urban-search-rescue-chief-resigns.html).

⁹ *FEMA Didn’t Answer Thousands of Calls from Flood Survivors, Documents Show*, New York Times (July 11, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/2025/07/11/climate/fema-missed-calls-texas-floods.html).

routine contracts and expenses—for example, those crucial for positioning response teams and ordering supplies—that are typically signed off on in the field by expert staff and lawyers deployed to emergencies.¹⁰ The delays have even drawn the ire of congressional Republicans, with Republican Senator Ted Budd of North Carolina putting a hold on all DHS nominees in the Senate as a result of FEMA “stonewalling” funds and delaying the approval of aid for North Carolina’s recovery after Hurricane Helene.¹¹

Mismanagement and unnecessary red tape imperil FEMA’s ability to perform its important work, including directing funding to states, local communities, tribes, and territories to minimize the impact of future disasters and deliver resources to the most vulnerable, including rural communities.¹² Under the Biden-Harris Administration, FEMA made progress in better delivering its mission, including overhauling individual assistance programs, allocating resilience funding more fairly, and making fighting climate change a priority.¹³ The Trump Administration is not only walking back this progress, but also gutting FEMA’s foundation and core programs, through arbitrary programmatic and personnel cuts that are already damaging FEMA’s ability to respond to emergencies.¹⁴

The purge of the nonpartisan, career civil service by the Trump Administration—including through reduction in force efforts, the wasteful deferred resignation program, and illegal firing of probationary employees—is straining FEMA’s workforce and leaving fewer staff available to be deployed to disasters. The Administration’s efforts to cut costs and shrink the agency have also contributed to a wave of additional resignations and retirements, adding to the strain on the workforce and resulting in fewer senior and experienced leaders and significantly harming morale across the agency.¹⁵ A report by the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office published in September 2025 found that FEMA has lost almost 10% of its staff in only the first half of the year and that these staffing issues threaten the effectiveness of federal disaster

¹⁰ *Noem’s Spending Rule Causes Delays at Homeland Security Dept.*, New York Times (Aug. 21, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/2025/08/21/us/kristi-noem-spending-contracts-homeland-security-department.html).

¹¹ *GOP Senator Rails on Trump’s DHS Over Slow Pace of Hurricane Relief and Vows to Stall Nominees*, CNN (Sept. 9, 2025) (online at www.cnn.com/2025/09/09/politics/ted-budd-dhs-nominees-hurricane-helene); *Republican Frustration with Kristi Noem Has Reached a Boiling Point*, NOTUS (Oct. 17, 2025) (online at www.notus.org/congress/kristi-noem-frustration-republicans-dhs-fema).

¹² *FEMA Was Starting To Fix Long-Standing Problems. Then Came the Trump Administration*, NPR (June 5, 2025) (online at www.npr.org/2025/06/05/nx-s1-5413185/fema-equity-disaster-trump-reform-hurricane-wildfire).

¹³ *Biden’s FEMA Director Tried to Fix the Agency. Did She Succeed?* Grist (Sept. 4, 2024) (online at <https://grist.org/extreme-weather/deanne-criswell-biden-fema-interview-flood-insurance/>).

¹⁴ *See* Government Accountability Office, *Disaster Assistance High-Risk Series: Federal Response Workforce Readiness* (GAO-25-108598) (Sept. 2, 2025) (online at www.gao.gov/products/gao-25-108598).

¹⁵ *Head of FEMA Command Center Quits After Trump Says He’ll Phase Out the Agency*, New York Times (June 12, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/2025/06/12/climate/fema-resignations-trump-disaster.html); *FEMA Search and Rescue Chief Resigns After Frustration with Texas Flood Response*, CNN (July 21, 2025) (online at www.cnn.com/2025/07/21/politics/fema-search-and-rescue-chief-resigns); *Increased Bureaucracy and Low Morale: Inside FEMA Under Trump*, NOTUS (Sept. 23, 2025) (online at www.notus.org/trump-white-house/trump-fema-morale-efficiency).

response.¹⁶ This significant loss of staff under the Trump Administration presents a clear risk for interagency dysfunction, postponed deployments of lifesaving efforts, delayed distribution of benefits and resources, and staffing capacity issues during individual or overlapping disasters.¹⁷

In addition to these staffing cuts, President Trump has canceled preparedness programs and denied funding to states for recovery and resilience projects. This includes canceling the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program, which helped communities fix long-standing issues before disaster struck.¹⁸ In 2020, the Trump Administration touted the BRIC program as helping communities, but in 2025 described it as “wasteful” and “politicized” and canceled it.¹⁹ The Trump Administration halted Emergency Management Performance Grants, which help states train staff and acquire equipment to prepare for emergencies.²⁰ And Hazard Mitigation and Grant Program funds, which presidents have routinely approved for decades to help states to recover from a disaster and build resilience to prevent a similar disasters in the future, have been left in limbo by President Trump since April 2025.²¹

Disaster declaration decisions are taking longer under the Trump Administration.²² During the past decade, disaster declarations have typically taken about three weeks, while this year, it has already risen to over a month. More disaster declarations than usual are also being rejected. One state emergency management professional described the decisions as “very unusual.”²³ This leaves survivors of disasters waiting longer for aid, if they get it at all, and delays the response efforts of communities, such as in Mississippi this past spring, which waited

¹⁶ Government Accountability Office, *Disaster Assistance High-Risk Series: Federal Response Workforce Readiness* (Sept. 2, 2025) (GAO-25-108598) (online at www.gao.gov/products/gao-25-108598); Government Accountability Office, *FEMA Staffing Shortages Could Mean Disaster for Future Response Efforts* (Sept. 17, 2025) (online at www.gao.gov/blog/fema-staffing-shortages-could-mean-disaster-future-response-efforts).

¹⁷ *FEMA’s Staffing Shortages Have Hindered Past Disaster Recovery Efforts, GAO Says. Now the Agency Has Even Fewer Workers*, GovExec (Sept. 3, 2025) (online at www.govexec.com/workforce/2025/09/femas-staffing-shortages-have-hindered-past-disaster-recovery-efforts-gao-says-now-agency-has-even-fewer-workers/407871/).

¹⁸ *Rural Communities Were Promised Millions in Disaster Funds. Trump is Ending It.*, NPR (May 1, 2025) (online at www.npr.org/2025/05/01/nx-s1-5359452/trump-disaster-funding-cuts-fema-bric).

¹⁹ *Fact Sheet: FEMA Launches Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities*, Federal Emergency Management Agency (Sept. 25, 2020) (online at www.fema.gov/fact-sheet/fema-launches-building-resilient-infrastructure-and-communities); *Press Release: FEMA Ends Wasteful, Politicized Grant Program, Returning Agency to Core Mission of Helping Americans Recovering from Natural Disasters*, Federal Emergency Management Agency (Apr. 4, 2025) (previously online at www.fema.gov/press-release/20250404/fema-ends-wasteful-politicized-grant-program-returning-agency-core-mission) (on file with the Committee).

²⁰ *In Unusual Move, FEMA Halts Preparedness Grant Money, Orders States to Recount Their Populations Excluding Deported Migrants*, CNN (Oct. 2, 2025) (online at www.cnn.com/2025/10/02/politics/fema-halts-preparedness-grant-money-migrants).

²¹ *Trump Quietly Halts Money for Preventing Disaster Damage*, E&E News by Politico (May 1, 2025) (online at www.eenews.net/articles/trump-quietly-halts-money-for-preventing-disaster-damage/).

²² *How FEMA Is Forcing Disaster-Struck Towns to Fend for Themselves*, New York Times (Oct. 16, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/2025/10/16/climate/fema-disaster-recovery-trump.html).

²³ *Trump Denies Disaster Aid, Tells States To Do More*, Association of State Floodplain Managers (May 2, 2025) (online at www.floods.org/news-views/fema-news/trump-denies-disaster-aid-tells-states-to-do-more/).

50 days for a federal disaster declaration after a powerful storm that destroyed homes and businesses. These delays have real consequences for Americans.²⁴

These concerning developments do not make communities safer, nor do they save money. Lack of federal investment in infrastructure and community projects will only result in higher recovery costs after the next emergency. Research has shown that every dollar invested in disaster preparation reduces damage and cleanup costs by six dollars. When economic costs are taken into consideration, savings can be as high as thirteen dollars for every dollar invested in reliance and preparedness.²⁵ Natural disasters disproportionately hurt people and families with more limited resources and fewer options, and rebuilding can take years, causing hardship that doesn't end when initial disaster recovery efforts do. Continued and consistent support is critical for communities recovering from major storms or hurricanes.²⁶

The Trump Administration has also increasingly politicized FEMA's work and funding decisions this year, including withholding over \$300 million from states until they can account for recent deportations.²⁷ The Trump Administration has also seemingly tied disaster declaration approval to political support for the President, touting the approval of funding for states which voted for President Trump, such as Alaska, Missouri, and North Dakota, while denying multiple disaster declaration requests for Vermont and Maryland, which did not.²⁸ In another example, one project near the Florida home of Corey Lewandowski, Secretary Noem's so-called senior advisor, had previously stalled, but reportedly saw funding expedited and even a visit from the Secretary after one political donor made a call.²⁹ Despite being designated a 'Special Government Employee' Lewandowski is reportedly the "last stop before contracts move to DHS Secretary Kristi Noem's desk" and he himself has veto power over contracts, including those for FEMA, which has also reportedly contributed to the delays at the agency.³⁰

²⁴ *AP Finds Major Disaster Declarations Are Taking Longer Under Trump*, Associated Press (Sept. 9, 2025) (online at <https://apnews.com/article/fema-natural-disaster-declaration-trump-7506ce6a68543f4515eabe7992d9a5a0>).

²⁵ *The Preparedness Payoff: The Economic Benefits of Investing in Climate Resilience*, U.S. Chamber of Commerce (June 25, 2024) (online at www.uschamber.com/security/the-preparedness-payoff-the-economic-benefits-of-investing-in-climate-resilience).

²⁶ *Do You Rent? You May Be More Vulnerable to Climate-Driven Disasters*, NPR (July 31, 2024) (online at www.npr.org/2024/07/31/nx-s1-4998376/renters-and-weather-disasters).

²⁷ *FEMA Withholds \$300 Million in Grants Until States Account for Deportations*, New York Times (Oct. 3, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/2025/10/03/climate/fema-emergency-grants-immigration-population.html).

²⁸ *Disaster Declarations Continue to Highlight Trump's Partisan Favoritism*, Center for Economic and Policy Research (Oct. 28, 2025) (online at <https://cepr.net/publications/disaster-declarations-continue-to-highlight-trumps-partisan-favoritism/>); *Trump Approves Disaster Declarations for Red States, As Blue States Go Without*, MSNBC (Oct. 24, 2025) (online at www.msnbc.com/rachel-maddow-show/maddowblog/trump-approves-disaster-declarations-red-states-blue-states-go-rcna239604).

²⁹ *ICE Barbie Accused of Rushing Money to Rebuild Pier Near Alleged Lover's Home*, The Daily Beast (Sept. 26, 2025) (online at www.thedailybeast.com/ice-barbie-kristi-noem-accused-of-rushing-money-to-rebuild-pier-near-alleged-lover-corey-lewandowskis-home/).

³⁰ *Lewandowski's Veto Power Over DHS Contracts Frustrates Admin Official: 'Corey is Part of the Problem'*, Politico (Aug. 27, 2025) (online at www.politico.com/news/2025/08/27/tk-00527043).

FEMA employees themselves are sounding the alarm. On August 25, 2025, more than 180 active and former FEMA employees sent a letter to Congress and the White House's FEMA Review Council on the Trump Administration's actions to alter the size and operations of FEMA.³¹ They highlighted systemic concerns, some of which reportedly violate the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006.³² Instead of taking these concerns seriously, DHS retaliated against FEMA employees by placing public signatories of the letter on administrative leave and launching investigations into employees—in violation of whistleblower protection laws and the signatories' first amendment rights.³³ Committee Democrats take whistleblower concerns seriously—particularly those that allege potentially catastrophic risk to American families—and we will get answers.

The Trump Administration's gutting of FEMA heightens risk for every American. A tornado earlier this year in St. Louis, Missouri, which left five people dead and multiple homes destroyed, is already demonstrating the severe insufficiency of President Trump's FEMA, which has left city officials and residents still struggling months after the disaster with the response effort hampered by delays in getting contracts and grants approved.³⁴

In light of this mismanagement and the harm already inflicted on the public, Committee Democrats have been conducting oversight of DHS and FEMA, including regarding the agency's delayed response to the tragic flooding in Kerr County, Texas, and DHS and FEMA's illegal retaliation against whistleblowers.³⁵ As of November 3, 2025, we have yet to receive a substantive response to any of the Committee's letters. I reiterate my request for timely and fulsome responses to our July 11, 2025, September 17, 2025, and October 14, 2025, letters; please produce all responsive information by November 17, 2025. Additionally, to assist in the

³¹ *The FEMA Katrina Declaration*, Stand Up for Science (accessed on Sept. 24, 2025) (online at www.standupforscience.net/fema-katrina-declaration).

³² *FEMA Suspends Staff Who Signed a Letter Criticizing Trump*, New York Times (Aug. 26, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/2025/08/26/climate/fema-suspends-staff-who-criticized-trump-cuts.html); *FEMA Staffers Accuse Trump of Weakening Disaster Programs*, Politico (Aug. 25, 2025) (online at www.politico.com/news/2025/08/25/fema-staffers-rebuke-trump-administration-00522644).

³³ *FEMA Workers Put on Leave After Signing Letter Warning of Trump's Overhaul of the Agency*, CNN (Aug. 26, 2025) (online at www.cnn.com/2025/08/26/politics/fema-workers-administrative-leave-katrina-declaration-trump); *Trump Administration Launches Investigation Into FEMA Workers Who Warned Disaster Agency Was at Risk*, CNN (Sept. 23, 2025) (online at www.cnn.com/2025/09/23/politics/fema-investigating-workers-non-disclosure-agreement); 5 U.S.C. 2302.

³⁴ *FEMA Is Paralyzed. Disaster-Torn Communities Are Paying the Price*, Wall Street Journal (Sept. 28, 2025) (online at www.wsj.com/politics/policy/fema-delay-disaster-response-st-louis-1152f03c?mod=hp_lead_pos7).

³⁵ Letter from Ranking Member Robert Garcia, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Representative Jasmine Crockett, and Representative Greg Casar, to Senior Official Performing the Duties of the FEMA Administrator David Richardson, Federal Emergency Management Agency (July 11, 2025) (online at <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/democrats-oversight.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/2025-07-11.casar-crockett-garcia-to-fema-re-texas-floods.pdf>); Letter from Ranking Member Rick Larsen, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, et al. to Senior Official Performing the Duties of the FEMA Administrator David Richardson, Federal Emergency Management Agency (Oct. 14, 2025) (online at <https://democrats-transportation.house.gov/news/press-releases/democratic-ranking-members-to-fema-head-and-dhs-inspector-general-stop-retaliation-against-fema-whistleblowers>).

Committee's investigation, I request that you provide the following documents and information by November 17, 2025:

1. A detailed description of how DHS, FEMA, and the Trump Administration plan to ensure swift, efficient, and comprehensive disaster preparedness, response, and recovery services;
2. All documents and communications between and among the White House, the DHS Office of the Secretary, and FEMA, regarding operational decisions;
3. All expenses, contracts, or other decisions which have been subject to the "\$100k memo" and the Secretary's personal approval;³⁶
4. All documents and communications regarding Hazard Mitigation Grant Program requests from January 20, 2025, to the present;
5. All documents and communications regarding projects and initiatives which ceased operations from January 20, 2025, to the present;
6. All documents and communications regarding investigations being conducted by FEMA's Office of Professional Responsibility, since January 20, 2025;
7. All contracts entered into by FEMA or DHS since January 20, 2025;
8. A breakdown of all FEMA call center wait times, as compared to the last 5 years; and
9. A breakdown of individual and community assistance wait times, as compared to the last 5 years.

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 "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,



Robert Garcia
Ranking Member

³⁶ 'Absolutely Nuts': DHS Secretary to Review All Contract, Grant Awards Over \$100k, Federal News Network (June 18, 2025) (online at <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/acquisition-policy/2025/06/absolutely-nuts-dhs-secretary-to-review-all-contract-and-grant-awards-over-100k/>).

Mr. David Richardson

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cc: The Honorable James Comer, Chairman