



**One Hundred Nineteenth Congress
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515**

January 13, 2026

The Honorable Kristi Noem
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Ms. Karen Evans
Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street SW Washington, DC 20024

Dear Secretary Noem and Ms. Evans:

We write to express serious concern regarding widespread and ongoing delays across the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA or the Agency) disaster recovery operations—delays that are leaving disaster survivors, local governments, and States across the country in prolonged uncertainty and financial distress. FEMA has systematically failed to make timely determinations, obligate funds, and provide clear guidance for communities attempting to rebuild.

For example, more than year after Hurricane Helene, nearly 600 homeowners in North Carolina remain in limbo as they wait for FEMA's response about whether the Agency will buy their homes.¹ FEMA's home buyout program purchases flood-damaged homes at pre-disaster value so families can relocate and communities can reduce future flood risk. North Carolina's buyout applications were submitted to FEMA beginning last February, yet FEMA has not approved any of these applications to date.² FEMA headquarters has not even provided information to FEMA's regional office about why these applications have not been approved, despite repeated requests. This refusal to communicate does not constitute agency reform or an efficient use of taxpayer dollars—it is bureaucratic paralysis and negligence.

¹ Bracy Dennis, *Hundreds of residents signed up for FEMA buyouts after Helene. Not one has been approved.*, WASHINGTON POST (Dec. 30, 2025), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2025/12/26/fema-buyouts-north-carolina-hurricane-helene/>.

² *Helene Hazard Mitigation Application Submissions*, N.C. Dep't of Pub. Safety, <https://www.ncdps.gov/helene-hazard-mitigation-application-submissions> (last visited Jan. 7, 2026).

Iowa is experiencing similar delays, with 150 homeowners waiting for FEMA’s response on home buyouts nearly 18 months after floods decimated their communities.³ Vermont homeowners, too, had been waiting for FEMA for over a year as of last July.⁴ Reportedly, sudden and opaque policy changes implemented by the Trump administration are at least partially responsible for these delays.⁵ Many applicants remain displaced, paying mortgages on uninhabitable homes while facing mounting financial strain and foreclosure risk. North Carolina officials said they have received little explanation from FEMA regarding why applications remain pending, with some suggesting that reviews are stalled at the level of the Secretary of Homeland Security.⁶

In North Carolina, the pending \$240 million in home buyouts represents just a fraction of stalled recovery funding. Governor Stein recently wrote that North Carolina’s pending reimbursements from FEMA’s Public Assistance program total nearly \$1 billion.⁷ These delays in already-approved funding are creating financial strain for local governments, nonprofits, and State agencies, who must use their limited budgets to cover the upfront costs of these projects while they wait for FEMA’s reimbursements.⁸

We are particularly concerned about FEMA’s delays in North Carolina considering Puerto Rico’s ongoing challenges receiving Public Assistance reimbursements to recover from Hurricanes Irma and Maria, which hit the island nearly 10 years ago. At the current rate of disbursement by the Trump administration, Puerto Rico will not receive its full funding until 2051 or later.⁹

FEMA’s delays in Puerto Rico—and across the country—are exacerbated by the Secretary of Homeland Security’s policy of personally reviewing all expenditures over \$100,000, which the Secretary herself wrote would take “a minimum of 5 days.”¹⁰ The Secretary implemented this policy to evade court orders that explicitly bar manual reviews of FEMA expenditures and any other actions that could pause or impede the distribution of Federal assistance to States.^{11,12} We called for the Secretary to end these dangerous and wasteful reviews months ago, yet this

³ *Rock Valley Still Waiting on FEMA Buyout, Increasing Request to 150 Properties*, NORTHWEST IOWA NOW (Dec. 17, 2025), <https://northwestiowanow.com/news/278872-rock-valley-still-waiting-on-fema-buyout-increasing-request-to-150-properties/>.

⁴ Carly Berlin, *Since the historic floods of 2023, few Vermont residents have buyout money in hand*, VT DIGGER (July 17, 2025), <https://vtdigger.org/2025/07/17/since-the-historic-floods-of-2023-few-vermont-residents-have-buyout-money-in-hand/>.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Bracy Dennis, *Hundreds of residents signed up for FEMA buyouts after Helene. Not one has been approved.*, WASHINGTON POST (Dec. 30, 2025), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2025/12/26/fema-buyouts-north-carolina-hurricane-helene/>.

⁷ Letter from Gov. Josh Stein to FEMA Acting Adm’r Karen Evans (Dec. 5, 2025), <https://ncnewsline.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Governor-Stein-letter-to-FEMA-Acting-Administrator-12-5-25.pdf>

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Kyle Siler-Evans et al., *Accelerating Puerto Rico’s Disaster Recovery: A Synthesis of Findings and Recommendations*, RAND (Dec. 17, 2025), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA2959-14.html.

¹⁰ Kristi Noem, *Memorandum for Component Heads: Spending Over \$100,000* (June 11, 2025) (on file with committee).

¹¹ *State of New York v. Trump, Temporary Restraining Order* (D.R.I. Jan. 31, 2025), https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.ri.58912/gov.uscourts.ri.58912.50.0_14.pdf.

¹² *State of New York v. Trump, Order on Preliminary Injunction* (D.R.I. Apr. 10, 2025), https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.ri.58912/gov.uscourts.ri.58912.175.0_5.pdf.

unprecedented red tape has continued, causing harm to local economies and disaster survivors.^{13,14}

Taken together, these examples point to a broader failure to move disaster recovery forward in a timely and transparent manner. They also call into question Secretary Noem's recent statement, made under oath, that "FEMA dollars are going out twice as fast than they ever have before."¹⁵

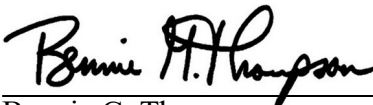
Accordingly, we request that you provide the following information:

1. An explanation for the prolonged delays affecting recovery efforts following Hurricane Helene, including the lack of home buyout approvals more than a year after the disaster.
2. Data regarding requests submitted to the Secretary of Homeland Security for FEMA contracts and grants over \$100,000, including the total number of requests submitted to date, the total number approved, the average length of time between submission and approval, and the number of requests currently pending.
3. The specific steps DHS and FEMA are taking to clear existing backlogs and ensure timely recovery assistance going forward.
4. Data to support the Secretary's statement that "FEMA dollars are going out twice as fast than they ever have before."

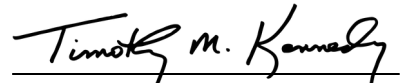
Disaster survivors and communities deserve timely decisions, transparency, and accountability—not indefinite delays while recovery remains out of reach. We urge you to act immediately to address these issues and ensure that FEMA's programs operate as Congress intended.

We look forward to your prompt response by January 26, 2026.

Sincerely,



Bennie G. Thompson
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security



Timothy M. Kennedy
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Emergency
Management & Technology

¹³ Bennie G. Thompson, *Twenty Years After Katrina, This Administration Is Repeating FEMA's Deadliest Mistakes*, NEWSWEEK (Aug. 28, 2025), <https://www.newsweek.com/democratic-rep-twenty-years-after-katrina-this-administration-repeating-femas-deadliest-2120985>.

¹⁴ Letter from Rep. Pablo Hernandez et al. to Sec'y of Homeland Security Kristi Noem and FEMA Acting Adm'r David Richardson (Aug. 11, 2025), https://hernandez.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/hernandez.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/letter-to-sec-noem-on-new-100k-budget-directive.signed.final_.pdf.

¹⁵ *Worldwide Threats to the Homeland* Before the H. Comm. on Homeland Sec., 119th Cong. (Dec. 11, 2025) (statement of Kristi Noem, Sec'y of Homeland Security).



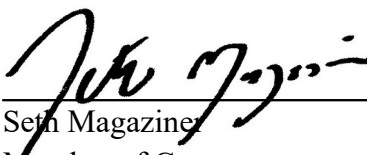
Eric Swalwell
Member of Congress



J. Luis Correa
Member of Congress



Shri Thanedar
Member of Congress



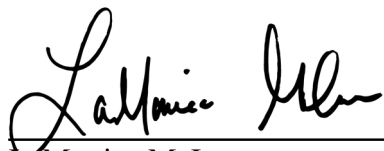
Seth Magaziner
Member of Congress



Dan Goldman
Member of Congress



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Member of Congress



LaMonica McIver
Member of Congress



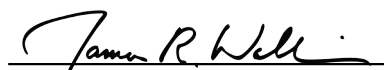
Julie Johnson
Member of Congress



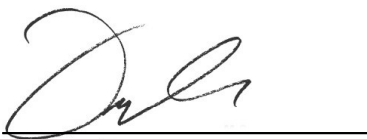
Pablo José Hernández
Member of Congress



Nellie Pou
Member of Congress



James R. Walkinshaw
Member of Congress



Troy A. Carter, Sr.
Member of Congress



Al Green
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Andrew R. Garbarino, Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security

