



# COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)**

***Protecting Every Citizen: Assessing Emergency Preparedness for Underserved Populations***  
**Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery**

**July 23, 2019**

It is unfortunate that FEMA has decided not to participate today. Their absence undermines the Subcommittee's ability to conduct meaningful oversight and sends a chilling message to underserved populations who are affected by disasters the most and who generally depend on FEMA the most.

Underserved populations are more susceptible to the risks associated with disasters and following disasters, and it is significantly more difficult for them to recover. Having experienced Hurricane Katrina, I know how strenuous going through the basic emergency response and recovery activities can be for communities, and how this is especially so for individuals with access and functional needs, children, the elderly, and the poor. For example, during Hurricane Katrina, the average income of those who did not evacuate was \$19,500, and only 54 percent of those who stayed had a car.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, many low-income, elderly, and disabled survivors remained in their public housing complexes, despite having no power or heat, due to a lack of transportation and generally having no other place to go. These and other issues concerning vulnerable populations influenced enactment of the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006, which established the Director of the Office of Disability Integration and Coordination to ensure the unique needs of the disability community are considered and addressed in FEMA's emergency activities.

I am also proud of the work the Committee on Homeland Security has done through the years to address the needs of vulnerable and underserved populations in times of emergency. I commend Chairman Payne for his bill, the Homeland Security for Children Act, which would ensure that children's needs are included in Department of Homeland Security-wide activities and would ensure that there is established a children's technical expert within FEMA. Senator Elizabeth Warren and I requested the Government Accountability Office review the impact Federal disaster programs have on socioeconomic inequality.

The need to elevate emergency preparedness, response, and recovery efforts for vulnerable and underserved populations is all too clear, and for that I look forward to engaging with the witnesses to get a better understanding of how the Federal government can better serve them in emergency. With extreme weather events increasing in frequency and intensity, it is critical that we continue to do what is necessary to improve emergency preparedness for vulnerable and underserved populations. Every American deserves that in times of disaster, and I am pleased the Subcommittee is taking time today to figure out how we can improve.

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