



# COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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

***Critical Infrastructure Preparedness and Resilience: A Focus on Water***

**September 21, 2022**

I would like to begin by saying that my thoughts are with those in Alaska, Puerto Rico, California, and Oregon who are experiencing disasters. Over the weekend, Alaskans felt the impact of a typhoon, while Puerto Rico was hit with Hurricane Fiona, nearly five years to the day since Hurricane Maria. Meanwhile, Americans in the West are dealing with wildfires and record-breaking temperatures.

As the Nation continues to cope with simultaneous natural disasters, and as we recognize National Preparedness Month this month, today's hearing on preparedness and resilience is timely. The preparedness and resilience of critical infrastructure, and particularly water infrastructure, hits close to home.

My community of Jackson, Mississippi, suffered serious flooding last month, which contributed to the failure of a water pumping station and left more than 100,000 of my constituents without clean water or appropriately managed wastewater. Residents could not use the water coming out of their faucets to brush their teeth, bathe, or wash the dishes. The lack of water led to school and business closures, and tens of millions of gallons of untreated wastewater flowed into Jackson-area waterways. The State has recently lifted the boil water advisory, but sporadic boil water notices continue in the city. This crisis is not over – and will not be over until we fix the underlying problems that caused it, starting with a lack of investment in critical infrastructure, such as our water systems.

Jackson is not alone — many areas around the country have suffered from disinvestment and struggle with aging infrastructure, particularly in communities of color and low-income areas. In fact, of the water systems that consistently violate Federal drinking water standards, 40% of them serve communities of color. That is not a coincidence. Studies show that Black and Brown communities are more likely to bear the brunt of natural disasters.

To make matters worse, infrastructure investments and disaster assistance are often directed to areas that already have more resources rather than those that desperately need it. I have seen this time and time again as these dollars are steered away from communities like those I represent. Clearly, FEMA and its partners must do a better job of ensuring States provide Federal funding to those communities most in need.

For years, I have been a champion of equity—this Congress I was proud to see my legislation, the FEMA Equity Act, pass the House as part of the National Defense Authorization Act. I intend for this legislation to be part of a concerted effort to address the lack of equity in infrastructure investment, disaster assistance funding, and other Federal programs. I applaud the Biden Administration's commitment to that work, and I will do everything in my power to ensure we make real progress for Jackson and communities like mine across the United States.

To that end, I am looking forward to having a fruitful discussion today about how we can invest in infrastructure, improve preparedness, and bolster resilience so that all communities have the tools they need to weather the storms we face.

# # #

Media contact: Adam Comis at 202-225-9978