

STATEMENT  
OF  
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY  
BEFORE  
THE  
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*“Examining FEMA’s Readiness to Meet its Mission”*

Submitted  
By  
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Chair Thompson, Ranking Member Katko, and Members of the Committee. My name is Deanne Criswell, and I am the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). I am delighted to appear before you to discuss the President's Budget request for FEMA in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022, and to describe how the President's vision guides my priorities for FEMA as the Agency's new Administrator.

FEMA's mission of supporting people before, during, and after disasters has never been more critical. Our role during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the numerous other disasters we are actively supporting, attests to the vital importance and responsibility of this Agency to our Nation. Given FEMA's unprecedented mission requirements, the President's Budget increases the overall FEMA budget to \$28.4 billion, which is \$1.9 billion more than the FY 2021 enactment. I believe that the President's Budget, if enacted, will put FEMA on sound footing to meet the challenges ahead.

Climate change is making natural disasters more frequent, more intense, and more destructive, and we must be prepared for another challenging series of disaster events this summer and fall. Last year, FEMA faced record-setting hurricane and wildfire seasons. Response and recovery operations from many of these past disasters continue even as FEMA pivots to prepare for what lies ahead. The FY 2022 President's Budget would increase the major disaster allocation in the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) from \$17.1 billion to \$18.8 billion to address ongoing Stafford Act disasters. This includes \$9.3 billion for COVID-19; \$4.1 billion for Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria; \$2.2 billion for non-catastrophic disasters; \$1.2 billion for catastrophic disasters; and \$2.0 billion in reserve in anticipation of additional COVID-19 costs.

In my first months as the FEMA Administrator, I am focused on three key priorities, which are guided by the President's vision: (1) supporting the FEMA workforce and our readiness; (2) integrating equity into everything we do, and (3) addressing climate change through risk reduction. In today's testimony, I will describe these priorities in turn.

**Supporting the FEMA workforce and our readiness.** FEMA's workforce of more than 21,700 emergency managers does exceptional work every day to deliver our mission and as FEMA's Administrator, their readiness and well-being is my first priority.

Prioritizing the health and safety of FEMA's workforce enables us to best ensure that our personnel are ready to deploy or re-deploy to any disaster at a moment's notice. FEMA will continue to take all necessary measures to prioritize workforce health and safety within the COVID-19 environment. FEMA's workforce became eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine through the Department of Homeland Security's Operation Vaccinate our Workforce, which was launched in late January. Where appropriate, we continue to rely on virtual operations and inspections, as well as no-contact service methods, to protect both our workforce and the communities they serve. As we prepare for a post-COVID-19 environment, we are evaluating how to enhance operational capacity, and promote an agile and expeditionary culture, while we support remote work where appropriate and return to the workplace safely.

Workforce readiness means that our people are ready to respond. This starts with having the right staffing levels. The FY 2022 Budget supports increased hiring, and among other things would result in a 14 percent increase in the number of FEMA's Stafford Act employees.

Readiness also means the workforce has the training, tools, and resources they need to do their job, and I am committed to providing them. For instance, FEMA's Incident Management (IM) workforce is currently comprised of nearly 11,000 personnel. The FY 2022 Budget includes \$32.3 million to not only recruit additional staff for the Incident Management Workforce, but to also train and equip them.

As we enter the 2021 hurricane and wildfire seasons and continue to prepare for no-notice events, our workforce has never been more experienced or tested. However, I recognize that many of our staff have been activated in support of COVID-19 response operations and numerous other disaster declarations for over a year, and we will ensure that our deployed workforce gets the rest and training to be ready for what comes next.

Longer term, we also need to continue to professionalize the field of emergency management by better defining what it means to be an emergency manager and building career paths for the Nation's emergency management workforce.

**Integrating equity into everything we do.** The Nation deserves to have our programs and services delivered fairly and equitably. To meet this expectation, diversity, equity, and inclusion are not optional and must be core components of how we conduct ourselves and execute our mission. They are not empty buzzwords. FEMA is actively working to meet this expectation and reduce unnecessary barriers to program participation for disaster survivors, grant recipients, and other key stakeholders. That includes low-income households and other traditionally vulnerable populations. We know we have work to do and we are committed to doing it. FEMA is currently soliciting feedback from the public and our partners to ensure we understand how our programs impact survivors of different demographics, and we are committed to making changes where needed. This includes changes to our policies, procedures, or how we deploy and execute our mission.

Internally, this means understanding that to help individuals we must create safe and welcoming environments and that we do this by building a diverse and inclusive workforce which resembles the communities we serve. Externally, it means we cannot be satisfied only with assisting those who seek us out—we must also proactively identify and reach out to underserved communities and populations most in need of our help. We are analyzing our operational programs through the lens of equity for a reason. We know that disasters exacerbate existing inequalities, and we need to ensure that FEMA assistance reaches everyone who needs it. We must also come together across all disaster recovery stakeholders to identify the root causes of differing recovery outcomes for survivors and work aggressively and collectively to ensure equity in disaster response and recovery.

FEMA's commitment to equity is further evident in our efforts to advance the accessibility of COVID-19 vaccines. At the President's direction, FEMA coordinated with federal and state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) partners to support the establishment and expansion of over

2,100 Community Vaccination Centers (CVCs) to achieve the Administration's goal of administering 200 million shots in 100 days. This included 39 federally led CVC pilot sites and the deployment of 18 mobile vaccination units to help reach traditionally underserved and more remote communities. As part of these efforts, FEMA established a Civil Rights Advisory Group (CRAG) in January with our federal partners to support the Administration's priority of making equity a cornerstone of the COVID-19 response. The CRAG supported the development of the methodology used to determine federally led CVC pilot site selections and has worked in all ten FEMA regions to collect and analyze demographic data, identify underserved communities, and collaborate with community-based organizations. Nearly 60 percent of all doses administered at federally led pilot CVCs went to communities of color, and interpretation services have been provided to non-English speakers in over 180 languages.

As we execute our response to COVID-19 and other disasters, FEMA will continue to prioritize equity across all operations, both internally and externally. In support of this priority, the FY 2022 President's Budget includes an additional 54 employees at Headquarters and in the Regions, who will focus on equity issues. Among other things, these staff will analyze the extent to which FEMA is delivering programs and services fairly and equitably, as well as make data-informed recommendations for how FEMA can improve the delivery of its programs and services nationwide.

**Addressing climate change through risk reduction.** As emergency managers, we must face the challenges that climate change poses to our mission head-on and make generational-level investments to reduce the impacts we are experiencing as a result. Disasters are more frequent and more costly. While we will always be ready to respond when disasters occur, we recognize that true success rests in mitigating the worst impacts of disasters before they occur. As a former firefighter in Colorado, I understand the impact mitigation has. Developing resilient communities ahead of an incident reduces both the loss of life and economic disruption, and, according to an independent study by the National Institute of Building Sciences in 2019, every dollar in federal hazard mitigation grants invested in mitigation is estimated to save the American taxpayer six dollars in future spending.

To provide local partners with financial support for mitigation projects, FEMA will expand the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program. I would like to thank Congress for providing the legislative tools to create BRIC, per Section 1234 of the Disaster Recovery Reform Act of 2018 (DRRA). By establishing a reliable stream of funding for larger mitigation projects through a nationwide grant program, the BRIC program provides a critical opportunity for governments to invest in a more resilient nation, reduce disaster suffering, and avoid future disaster costs. Recently, the President visited FEMA to announce that he was increasing the funding available for the BRIC program to \$1 billion for the FY 2021 Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) application period. FEMA will set funding levels for the FY 2022 BRIC program consistent with the President's priorities.

Mitigating the increasing risk of flooding will be an important component of FEMA's efforts to increase our Nation's resilience to climate change. As millions of American families have unfortunately experienced first-hand, flooding is the most common and costly natural disaster in the United States. Furthermore, direct average annual flood losses have quadrupled from

approximately \$4 billion per year in the 1980s to roughly \$17 billion per year between 2010 and 2018. Over the past decade, flooding and coastal storms have accounted for roughly 70 percent of all Presidential Disaster Declarations.

We must drive the kind of system-based mitigation this Nation needs to make our communities more resilient to flooding. The President's FY 2022 Budget requests more than \$428 million for the Flood Hazard Mapping and Risk Analysis Program (Risk MAP) to allow for climate change data to be incorporated into flood risk analysis. The FY 2022 Budget also requests \$5 million to help other federal agencies put flood resilience measures into effect. A further \$5 million is requested in FY 2022 for climate research and nature-based solutions, to provide funding for actionable climate research that can be used by SLTT partners to design and build innovative mitigation projects which address the impacts of climate change. By investing in mitigation, our federal and SLTT partners will be better prepared for future extreme weather events and be able to recover faster at the individual and community level.

FEMA is also working to ensure that communities are protected financially as well as physically from flooding. Flood insurance policies through the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) can help households fill a financial void when a disaster occurs and better rebuild their lives in its aftermath. For the first time in nearly 50 years, FEMA will update the NFIP pricing methodology to communicate flood risk more clearly so households can make more informed decisions on risk, insurance, and mitigation actions to protect against the perils of flooding and climate change. These changes will also fix longstanding inequities in flood insurance pricing by more closely aligning insurance premiums to the specific flood risk of each home. The FY 2022 Budget also proposes a means-tested affordability proposal.

## **Conclusion**

The COVID-19 pandemic has represented an important turning point for our country, and challenges us to rethink our systems, decisions, and investments. This past year has not been easy, and I would like to recognize the professionalism, resilience, and perseverance demonstrated by the FEMA workforce and our partners. As we look to the challenges ahead, I look forward to working with the Members of this Committee as we build a more ready and resilient nation. Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions.