



# COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Hearing Statement of Emergency Preparedness, Response, & Recovery Subcommittee Chairwoman Val Demings (D-FL)

### *Investing in the Future: A Review of the Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Request for the Federal Emergency Management Agency*

June 14, 2022

I would like to start the hearing by thanking you, Administrator Criswell, and the FEMA workforce for all that you do to fulfill your mission of helping people before, during, and after disasters. In recent years, FEMA has faced several challenges, which will only continue to grow due to climate change.

As the threat of climate change continues to grow due to increasing temperatures, record-breaking weather is our new reality. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has predicted another above-average hurricane season. In 2021 there were 58 major disaster declarations. This year we have already had 20 major disaster declarations.

In Florida, we have experienced multiple extreme weather events over the years. In 2017, Hurricane Irma caused 84 deaths in my home state of Florida, and nearly \$50 billion in damages for the U.S. In 2020, Hurricane Sally, severely impacted Florida and resulted in \$7.3 billion in damages across the Florida Panhandle and Alabama. In 2022 alone, the Florida Forest Service has reported that 37 wildfires have destroyed over 22,000 acres in the state. And this year, FEMA's preparedness efforts must contend with supply chain problems. In Florida, we have real concerns about the critical labor and supply chain shortages that are impacting affecting Florida's electric cooperatives and municipalities. These issues highlight the importance of preparedness for disasters at all levels. Disasters impact communities on all fronts, but it also impacts our FEMA workforce.

However, disaster after disaster, FEMA has continuously risen to the challenge, but a changing threat landscape will only further add to FEMA's already burdened workload. I recognize the overwhelming responsibilities placed on FEMA and have held two hearings this year on FEMA's workforce. FEMA's workforce has experienced several challenges related to recruitment, retention, training, and harassment. I understand that FEMA is working to address these challenges and I look forward to hearing more today about how the Agency is working to help this incredible workforce thrive. Investing in FEMA's workforce ensures that they will continue to be prepared to tackle crises as they emerge. The Agency's Fiscal Year 2023 budget request contains several initiatives to help support and strengthen FEMA's workforce, including \$6.4 million for the Incident Management workforce.

FEMA administers preparedness grants to states and locals, such as the Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) and the State Homeland Security Program. These funds assist state and local jurisdictions with building and maintaining homeland security capabilities to prepare for and respond to threats. During my 27-year career in law enforcement and now as a Member of Congress, I have seen the benefits of UASI particularly in Orlando. When I was a Chief of Police, I relied on the UASI program to help keep my community safe.

Last year, I introduced, H.R. 5615, the *Homeland Security Capabilities Preservation Act*, which recognizes the importance of preserving security capabilities achieved with UASI funding for communities. I am pleased that the legislation passed the House in March. I will continue to do my part and push for this legislation until it becomes law. As an advocate for the UASI program, I am concerned about the Agency's budget request for Fiscal Year 2023, which proposes cuts to the Urban Area Security Initiative and the State Homeland Security Program. I look forward to our conversation today about these vital programs.

I am grateful to see that FEMA's proposed budget, requests \$360 million for the Nonprofit Security Grant Program, which is \$110 million above the Fiscal Year 2022 enacted funding. The proposed funding increase is especially important because in recent years, we have seen a spate of threats against nonprofits, specifically houses of worship and Historically Black Colleges and Universities. This year, we have seen the value of the Nonprofit Security Grant Program. For example, Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker recalled training funded by the program to help himself and congregants escape an armed individual, who was holding them hostage, at Congregation Beth Israel synagogue in Colleyville, Texas.

Additionally, in 2022 alone, there have been at least 36 bomb threats to HBCUs. These threats demand a response, and I will continue to advocate for resources, such as the Nonprofit Security Grant Program, to keep houses of worship and our students safe. As we respond to the challenges at hand, we must also recognize that disasters, and disaster recovery, do not impact individuals the same way; some communities are more vulnerable than others. I commend Administrator Criswell and the Biden Administration for taking steps to protect those who are most vulnerable by integrating equity into initiatives such as the 2022-2026 FEMA Strategic Plan, which instills equity as a foundation for emergency management as its primary goal.

Furthermore, I am a proud cosponsor of Chairman Bennie Thompson's legislation, H.R. 7668, the *Federal Emergency Management Advancement of Equity Act*, which is a tremendous step in making disaster response efforts fairer and more effective. I look forward to hearing from Administrator Criswell about how the proposed budget helps bolster FEMA and its ability to tackle the ever-growing threats and what Congress can do to assist.

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