



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

FEMA: Building a Workforce Prepared and Ready to Respond Part 2

March 1, 2022

In January, the Subcommittee held a hearing on this important topic with former FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate, the Government Accountability Office (GAO), and the RAND Corporation. I am pleased the Subcommittee is continuing the conversation with FEMA's newly confirmed Deputy Administrator, Erik Hooks. At the outset, let me thank the FEMA workforce for their service. They play a pivotal role in protecting our communities, including in my home state of Mississippi, where we have been hit by several disasters over the years.

FEMA's workforce has been challenged with responding to multiple large-scale disasters while being pulled into other critical missions. They have carried out response efforts related to the COVID-19 pandemic and supported other Federal agencies' missions, such as Operation Allies Welcome. FEMA is also responsible for allocating homeland security grants, including those designed to help nonprofit organizations protect themselves from terrorist threats.

FEMA's ability to support the Federal government's efforts in a variety of missions demonstrates its workforce's skill and adaptability. Nonetheless, the growing number of missions and the overall workload have strained the agency. Currently, FEMA is dealing with workforce challenges, including hiring, training, and retention. I am particularly concerned about hiring challenges within FEMA. Over the years, the agency has struggled to hire staff.

After the devastating 2017 hurricanes, GAO found that FEMA faced challenges in training employees and maintaining staffing levels across concurrent disasters. Another workforce challenge is retention. In 2020, more FEMA workers transferred to other agencies than in any other year over the past decade. This attrition could be the result of burnt-out, as FEMA employees have been going from one mission to the next, often without any reprieve between missions. Equally troubling is the Agency is addressing harassment, gender, race and ethnicity findings that were identified in a 2020 RAND Corporation report.

The Biden Administration is focusing on strengthening the FEMA workforce through its Fiscal Year 2022 budget request and in Administrator Deanne Criswell's 2022-2026 FEMA Strategic Plan. While these are important first steps, more work needs to be done to ensure that FEMA has a robust workforce that is fully equipped to handle its growing mission. I look forward to hearing from the Deputy Administrator today about the challenges facing the men and women of FEMA and what Congress can do to make this dedicated workforce stronger.

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