



One Hundred Nineteenth Congress
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

January 28, 2026

Ms. Orice Williams Brown
Acting Comptroller General
Government Accountability Office
441 G St., NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Acting Comptroller General Brown:

We write to request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) initiate an immediate investigation into planned workforce reductions at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the implications for FEMA’s operational readiness and ability to fulfill its mission. President Trump and Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem have made no secret of their desire to get rid of FEMA, and recent events make it clear that they are attempting to carry that goal forward.¹

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and FEMA recently outlined plans to potentially cut over 10,000 FEMA employees—about half of the Agency’s workforce—according to recent reporting.² DHS attempted to downplay these figures by describing them as part of “routine, pre-decisional planning exercises,” but they come on the heels of reports that Secretary Noem, in her capacity as co-chair of the FEMA Review Council, as recently as last month had been planning to recommend that FEMA’s workforce be cut in half.³

Secretary Noem appears to be moving full steam ahead with these cuts, even though the FEMA Review Council has not yet issued its recommendations and Federal law prohibits the Homeland Security Secretary from “substantially or significantly reducing the functions of FEMA or the Agency’s ability to perform its missions.”⁴ Within the last few weeks, DHS reportedly directed FEMA to allow contracts to expire for the Agency’s Cadre of On-Call Response and Recovery

¹ Rachel Frazin, *Noem says she plans to ‘eliminate FEMA,’* THE HILL (Mar. 25, 2025), <https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/5213057-noem-plans-eliminate-fema/>.

² Brianna Sacks, *Emails outline potential cuts affecting thousands of FEMA disaster responders,* WASH. POST (Jan. 5, 2026), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2026/01/05/fema-disaster-core-cuts-dhs-emails/>.

³ Gabe Cohen, *Exclusive: Trump’s FEMA council to recommend dramatic downsizing and overhaul – but not elimination – of the agency,* CNN (Dec. 10, 2025), <https://www.cnn.com/2025/12/10/politics/fema-council-report-recommend-downsizing-overhaul>.

⁴ Pub. L. No. 109-295 § 611 (6 U.S.C. § 306(c)(1)).

Employees (CORE), who make up about 40 percent of FEMA’s workforce.⁵ These cuts would include employees who are actively working on rebuilding efforts in places that recently suffered disasters.⁶ Beginning on New Year’s Eve, at least 50 CORE employees were told that their employment would end in early January, and DHS has made no indication that it plans to extend contracts for any of FEMA’s nearly 9,000 CORE employees, most of whom are on 2- to 4-year contracts.⁷ As of January 1, 2026, DHS had reportedly revoked FEMA’s authority to renew CORE employees without prior Departmental approval.⁸

The Trump administration has already inflicted sweeping cuts to FEMA’s workforce, despite ample evidence that the Agency needs a larger, not smaller, workforce to meet its mission. As you know, GAO added disaster assistance delivery to its high-risk list early last year, citing FEMA’s longstanding workforce shortages and a 35 percent staffing gap that continues to grow.⁹ GAO’s high-risk list is the Agency’s way of sounding the alarm about a small handful of priority issues that the Federal government most urgently needs to address. And just months ago, GAO reported that the cuts to FEMA’s workforce that took place in 2025 will challenge the Agency’s ability to respond to disasters.¹⁰ With FEMA already struggling to meet its life-saving mission due to staffing shortages, DHS’s pursuit of further workforce cuts is unconscionable.

What we are witnessing is yet another example of the Trump administration unilaterally attempting to destroy the Federal government in blatant defiance of legal restrictions and congressional will. Congress does not want to get rid of FEMA—every one of our districts has been impacted by disasters, and we know that the absence of FEMA will cost lives and devastate our communities. Secretary Noem knows that she does not have the authority to gut FEMA’s workforce, which is why her Department is stonewalling Congress and the media when asked about plans for terminating FEMA employees.

If the Trump administration’s actions continue, our country will very soon be only one major hurricane, wildfire, or earthquake away from suffering a historic, self-inflicted national catastrophe that will lay bare, in the scale of human lives lost, FEMA’s indispensable role. We must do all that we can to stop the Trump administration in its tracks.

Accordingly, we ask that GAO assess:

1. Whether DHS-directed workforce reductions and changes to contract renewal authority are consistent with the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act and any other Federal laws that prohibit actions that substantially or significantly reduce FEMA’s authorities, responsibilities, or functions.

⁵ Gabe Cohen, *Exclusive: DHS begins slashing FEMA disaster response staff as 2026 begins*, CNN (Jan. 2, 2026), <https://www.cnn.com/2026/01/01/politics/dhs-cutting-fema-disaster-response-staff>.

⁶ Rebecca Hersher, *FEMA is getting rid of thousands of workers in areas recovering from disasters*, NPR (Jan. 16, 2025), <https://www.npr.org/2026/01/16/nx-s1-5677605/fema-cuts-jobs-trump>.

⁷ Cohen, *supra* note 5.

⁸ Cohen, *supra* note 5.

⁹ GAO, *High-Risk Series: Heightened Attention Could Save Billions More and Improve Government Efficiency and Effectiveness*, GAO-25-107743 (Feb. 25, 2025), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-25-107743.pdf>.

¹⁰ GAO, *Disaster Assistance High-Risk Series: Federal Response Workforce Readiness*, GAO-25-108598 (Sept. 2, 2025), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-25-108598.pdf>.

2. The extent to which the planned or implemented reductions would impair FEMA's ability to fulfill its statutory responsibilities and its mission to help people before, during, and after natural and manmade disasters.
3. The role of DHS leadership in directing FEMA workforce decisions, including the rationale for revoking FEMA's contract renewal authority.
4. Whether DHS or FEMA conducted risk analyses to evaluate how proposed staffing reductions would affect FEMA's ability to carry out its mission and statutory responsibilities.

Given FEMA's essential role in protecting lives and property and the scale of the workforce reductions described in recent reporting, GAO's independent oversight is critical to ensuring accountability and informing Congress of the full operational and legal implications of these actions.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions, please have your staff call 202-226-2616.

Sincerely,



Bennie G. Thompson
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security



Timothy M. Kennedy
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Emergency
Management and Technology

cc: Melissa Wolf, Congressional Relations, GAO