



# COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

### *Improving the Federal Response: Perspectives on the State of Emergency Management*

March 13, 2019

As we know all too well, in 2017, the hurricane season and unprecedented wildfires exposed major gaps in our nation's emergency response capabilities and general preparedness.

FEMA's poor response to Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico highlighted how far behind we are in emergency management and how much further we must go to provide all Americans the help they need in times of disaster.

Having witnessed the catastrophe that was Hurricane Katrina, I know firsthand the horrors of a subpar emergency response from the Federal government and FEMA. For that reason, I am especially concerned that FEMA has not made more significant improvements in its response in the 14 years since Hurricane Katrina.

FEMA is not only the leader of the Federal government's emergency response efforts, but the Agency also supports and provides critical assistance to state and local governments in their time of need.

Simply put, State and local governments depend on FEMA's assistance when disaster strikes.

In addition to natural disasters being a threat to our nation, other security threats such as school shootings and lone-wolf terrorist attacks have been on the rise. These threats to our homeland underscore the importance of emergency preparedness, and the need for us to improve in this area. The consequences are too high for the status quo to remain.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses today about how the Federal government and, specifically FEMA, can improve its partnership with state and local governments to ensure a more robust response to disasters, both natural and manmade. Also, I look forward to hearing from our witness from the American Federation of Government Employees about the key role the workforce plays in protecting our nation from disasters.

I know FEMA continues to have staffing shortages and other workforce challenges it must address to improve its response capabilities and build a stronger agency. Congress needs to do its part to ensure FEMA does just that.

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