



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Subcommittee Chairman Donald M. Payne, Jr. (D-NJ)

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

March 13, 2019

As we have seen the last few years, disasters are affecting communities across America more frequently and more intensely. Storms are getting worse, and climate change will only continue that trend, unfortunately. Congress has to ensure that the Federal government is doing everything possible to support communities as they prepare for and recover from disasters.

Based on the outcomes from the 2017 storms, particularly in Puerto Rico, there is no question the Federal government's response needs improvement. That starts with investing more in preparedness before a disaster occurs, with the hope of saving lives and property and reducing costs after a disaster.

Research shows that for every \$1 we invest in mitigation funding, we save \$6 from reduced damage after a disaster. However, FEMA's Pre-Disaster Mitigation Fund still gets shortchanged every year. That needs to change. This is not just true for disasters, but all aspects of preparedness.

States and local governments need more support in preparing for terrorist attacks, too. As the nature of terrorism threats are changing, with increasing lone wolf and domestic extremist attacks, state and local governments need Federal assistance to build up their response capabilities. Unfortunately, funding for preparedness grants, the Homeland Security Grant Program, has not fully rebounded from cuts imposed by the Republican-controlled House in fiscal years 2011 and 2012.

That must change. Moreover, we must be prepared to respond to complex, concurrent events, as we saw in 2017, with multiple hurricanes and wildfires.

FEMA does not have enough workers to meet its target goals. Additionally, FEMA has not kept pace in ensuring its workers have adequate training. This was a particular problem in 2017, where FEMA's own assessment found that it "placed staff in positions beyond their experience and, in some instances, beyond their capabilities."

Our panel here today offers a range of diverse and unique perspectives into how the Federal government can improve in the fields of emergency management and preparedness. I look forward to hearing their views on this important topic, and to discussing with the Ranking Member and my colleagues how we can work together to ensure safer, more resilient communities.

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