



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

May 14, 2026

The Honorable Markwayne Mullin
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Mr. Robert J. Fenton, Jr.
Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street SW
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Secretary Mullin and Mr. Fenton:

As the 2026 hurricane season approaches, we write to express our serious and growing alarm over the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) deteriorating readiness to protect the American people. The Trump administration spent much of the past year systematically weakening FEMA—forcing out thousands of staff, halting critical preparedness programs, and stalling up to \$17 billion in disaster relief funding.¹ Hurricane season begins June 1st, and by every available measure FEMA is less prepared to respond than it has been in a generation.

The Trump administration has taken sweeping steps to hollow out our Nation's disaster preparedness infrastructure. In April 2025, FEMA announced it was ending the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities program, calling it “wasteful and ineffective” and canceling billions of dollars in projects for communities trying to improve their disaster resilience.² FEMA also withdrew Flood Mitigation Assistance funding for fiscal year 2025.³ Eliminating the two largest Federal programs dedicated to pre-disaster mitigation—both of which enjoyed broad bipartisan support—is not eliminating “waste.” It is simply transferring vulnerabilities directly to

¹ Scott Dance, *Extra Scrutiny of FEMA Aid to States Has Created a \$17 Billion Bottleneck*, NY TIMES (Jan. 27, 2026), <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/27/climate/fema-aid-kristi-noem.html>.

² *FEMA Ends Wasteful, Politicized Grant Program, Returning Agency to Core Mission of Helping Americans Recovering from Natural Disasters*, FEMA (Apr. 4, 2025), <https://web.archive.org/web/20250426001312/https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20250404/fema-ends-wasteful-politicized-grant-program-returning-agency-core-mission>.

³ *FEMA Is Eliminating Hazard Mitigation Programs, Leaving Americans Nationwide at Risk as Disasters Worsen*, URBAN INST. (Apr. 18, 2025), <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/fema-eliminating-hazard-mitigation-programs-leaving-americans-nationwide-risk-disasters-worsen>.

States, Tribes, territories, and localities, most of which do not have the resources to replicate these programs. Though FEMA recently restarted aspects of these programs in response to litigation, there is no indication that FEMA intends to continue these programs long term.

The Trump administration has simultaneously gutted FEMA's workforce, including at the highest levels. Nearly half of FEMA's top 38 leadership positions are currently vacant.⁴ For nearly a year and a half, President Trump failed to nominate a FEMA Administrator, leaving the Agency without permanent, qualified leadership. The Agency's most recently departed leader, Ms. Karen Evans, was assigned the duties of both Administrator and Chief of Staff. However, reportedly, Ms. Evans was not performing those jobs; a contractor named Kara Voorhies required Evans to route decisions through her.⁵ For more than a year, Voorhies acted as FEMA's "shadow Administrator," making decisions regarding FEMA's budget, grant and contract funding, workforce, and other matters that should only be the purview of Federal Government employees.⁶

The Trump administration has similarly gutted FEMA's on-the-ground workforce, virtually guaranteeing that the Agency will not be able to adequately respond to major incidents. Despite FEMA's longstanding severe staffing shortage,⁷ the Trump administration has overseen the departure of over 5,000 FEMA employees since January 2025.⁸ Last year, these cuts had severe implications for hurricane season readiness. On June 1, 2025, FEMA had only 12 percent of its incident management workforce available to respond to disasters—much less than in prior years.⁹ Recent reports indicate that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was planning to reduce FEMA's remaining workforce by as much as half, which would virtually guarantee that FEMA will begin the 2026 hurricane season with a record low number of employees.¹⁰ President Trump's hand-picked FEMA Review Council also recently recommended "reducing" FEMA's workforce.¹¹

DHS's interference in FEMA's ability to function has not been limited to workforce cuts. Former Secretary Kristi Noem's policy of reviewing contracts and grants over \$100,000 caused an unprecedented backlog of funding and, in many cases, the expiration of vital contracts. For example, FEMA officials reportedly spent months trying to renew the contract for HURREVAC—a hurricane evacuation planning tool used by tens of thousands of communities to calculate life-

⁴ *FEMA Offices & Leadership*, (last updated Feb. 10, 2026), <https://www.fema.gov/about/organization/offices-leadership>.

⁵ Gabe Cohen, *'Shadow administrator' at FEMA part of investigation by DHS internal watchdog, sources say*, CNN (Mar. 29, 2026), <https://edition.cnn.com/2026/03/29/politics/fema-dhs-investigation-watchdog-kara-voorhies>.

⁶ Brianna Sacks et al., *What spending probes at DHS reveal about Kristi Noem's time in office*, NY TIMES (Apr. 7, 2026), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/2026/04/05/noem-trump-dhs-fema-contracts/>.

⁷ Disaster Assistance High-Risk Series: Federal Response Workforce Readiness (GAO-25-108598), U.S. GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF. (Sept. 2025), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-25-108598.pdf>.

⁸ Email from FEMA on file with the Committee.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ 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/>.

¹¹ DHS, *FEMA Review Council Final Report* (May 7, 2026), https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2026-05/26_0507_fema%20review%20council_final%20report.pdf

or-death evacuation timing—but were stymied by Noem’s approval process.¹² This process also reportedly delayed life-saving search-and-rescue teams by three days after historic flooding struck Central Texas.¹³ The floods ultimately claimed the lives of over 130 people, including 36 children. Though Secretary Mullin rescinded this \$100,000 review policy, the backlog of lapsed contracts and the damaged relationships with contractors will have lasting consequences.

Given the life-or-death consequences of decisions about FEMA funding, perhaps most concerning is the administration’s unprecedented use of disaster relief as a political instrument. Under the Trump administration, Democratic-led States have seen their disaster aid requests approved at a rate of just 23 percent—compared to 89 percent for Republican-led States.¹⁴ In six cases, President Trump denied disaster assistance for Democratic-led States even after FEMA’s own on-the-ground inspections documented that the damage met the financial threshold for Federal assistance.¹⁵ And when the administration recently began releasing a portion of backlogged disaster funding, it excluded California, Illinois, Minnesota, and Colorado—States whose governors President Trump has clashed with.¹⁶

Forecasters project 11 to 16 named storms during the 2026 Atlantic hurricane season, including four to seven hurricanes.¹⁷ Regardless of seasonal forecasts, it only takes one storm to produce catastrophic loss of life and property. Americans in hurricane-prone communities deserve a FEMA that is fully staffed, operationally ready, and nonpartisan. By every measure, they do not have that today.

We therefore urge DHS and FEMA to immediately release any remaining withheld disaster relief funding; restore the HURREVAC contract and any other contracts needed to minimize the impacts of hurricanes; reverse workforce reductions and fill all vacant leadership positions with qualified, competent individuals; depoliticize the disaster declaration process; and provide Congress with a full and transparent accounting of the Agency’s current readiness posture. The American people cannot wait.

¹²Andrew Freedman, *Emergency planners around the country are about to lose access to a critical hurricane evacuation planning tool*, CNN (Mar. 25, 2026), <https://www.cnn.com/2026/03/24/weather/hurricane-evacuation-planning-lapse-fema>.

¹³Gabe Cohen and Michael Williams, *FEMA’s response to Texas flood slowed by Noem’s cost controls*, CNN (July 10, 2025), <https://www.cnn.com/2025/07/09/politics/fema-texas-flood-noem>.

¹⁴Thomas Frank, *It’s 3 times harder for blue states to get disaster funding under Trump*, POLITICO (Mar. 23, 2026), <https://www.politico.com/news/2026/03/23/trump-denies-disaster-aid-for-democratic-led-states-00831199>.

¹⁵Id.

¹⁶Gabe Cohen, *FEMA Disaster Aid: Trump Is About to Release Billions in Aid, but Several Blue States Won’t Be Included*, CNN (Feb. 26, 2026), <https://www.cnn.com/2026/02/26/politics/disaster-aid-fema-states-trump-shutdown>.

¹⁷Brian Lada, *Atlantic Hurricane Season Forecast 2026: 11–16 Named Storms Predicted by AccuWeather*, ACCUWEATHER (Mar. 25, 2026), <https://www.accuweather.com/en/hurricane/atlantic-hurricane-season-forecast-2026-11-16-named-storms-predicted-by-accuweather/1875776>.

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Sincerely,



Bennie G. Thompson
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security



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

cc: The Honorable Andrew R. Garbarino
Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security