

**FEMA PRIORITIES FOR 2022 AND THE  
2022-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN**

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(117-45)

**REMOTE HEARING**  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, AND  
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT  
OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON  
TRANSPORTATION AND  
INFRASTRUCTURE  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

APRIL 5, 2022

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Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

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APRIL 1, 2022

**SUMMARY OF SUBJECT MATTER**

TO: Members, Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management  
FROM: Subcommittee Staff  
RE: Subcommittee Hearing on “FEMA Priorities for 2022 and the 2022–2026 Strategic Plan”

**PURPOSE**

The Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management will meet on Tuesday, April 5, 2022, at 10:00 a.m. in 2167 Rayburn House Office Building and via Zoom, to receive testimony from the Honorable Deanne Criswell, Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) regarding “FEMA Priorities for 2022 and the 2022–2026 Strategic Plan.”

**BACKGROUND**

*DEVELOPMENTS SINCE SUBCOMMITTEE’S LAST HEARING WITH THE FEMA ADMINISTRATOR*

The subcommittee last received testimony from Administrator Deanne Criswell on June 23, 2021.<sup>1</sup> There have been many notable developments since that hearing, including:

- On August 5, 2021, President Biden approved a more than \$3.26 billion increase for the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)<sup>2</sup>, which was authorized by COVID–19 major disaster declarations.<sup>3</sup> The approval makes states eligible for HMGP funds with a 75 percent federal share that equal 4 percent of their COVID–19 disaster costs.<sup>4</sup> This one-time investment represents a 23 percent increase in HMGP funding made available for declared disasters since the program’s inception in 1988;<sup>5</sup>
- On September 2, 2021, FEMA announced it will now accept additional forms of documentation to verify the occupancy and ownership requirements of dis-

<sup>1</sup> Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management. (June 23, 2021). Hearing: *FEMA’s Priorities for FY22 and Beyond: Coordinating Mission, Vision, and Budget*.

<sup>2</sup> 42 U.S.C. 5170c.

<sup>3</sup> FEMA. (August 5, 2021). *Biden Administration Commits Historic \$3.46 Billion in Hazard Mitigation Funds to Reduce the Effects of Climate Change*. Available at <https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20210805/biden-administration-commits-historic-346-billion-hazard-mitigation-funds>

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

aster survivors seeking Individual Assistance (IA).<sup>6</sup> The policy change has made IA more accessible to underserved communities and homeowners that do not have access to a deed or formal proof of homeownership.<sup>7</sup> The agency will also now provide Other Needs Assistance (ONA) grants to qualifying homeowners and renters that sustained real property damage but did not render their home uninhabitable; revise inspection procedures and training to better identify and address disaster caused mold; and expanded assistance for disaster caused disability;<sup>8</sup>

- On October 1, 2021, FEMA implemented the first round of policy updates as part of the agency's Risk Rating 2.0 initiative, which will reform the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP).<sup>9</sup> The updated program will offer more equitable and risk informed rates that consider climate change and the cost to rebuild a structure when calculating flood insurance premiums;<sup>10</sup>
- On October 28, 2021, FEMA created the Climate Adaptation Enterprise Steering Group that will focus on developing a unified agency approach to address the impacts of climate change across all agency programs and operations.<sup>11</sup> This includes continued implementation of the Federal Flood Risk Management Standard (FFRMS) for all federal investments; and<sup>12</sup>
- On March 15, 2022, FEMA's funeral assistance for COVID-19 topped \$2 billion and supported over 300,000 applicants.<sup>13</sup> FEMA also announced the launch of an outreach campaign to spread awareness regarding the funeral assistance program in communities with high COVID-19 death rates and low funeral assistance application rates.<sup>14</sup>

#### *FEMA's 2022–2026 STRATEGIC PLAN*

Every four years FEMA publishes a strategic plan to outline the agency's vision and identify three goals to address challenges. FEMA engaged with a diverse range of stakeholders, including Tribes, FEMA employees, and external partners to develop the 2022–2026 Strategic Plan.<sup>15</sup> FEMA collected public input through a Climate and Equity Request for Information.<sup>16</sup> Upon review of the feedback, Administrator Criswell identified the following goals as FEMA's priorities for 2022–2026.<sup>17</sup>

##### *Goal 1: Instill Equity as a Foundation of Emergency Management*

The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Stafford Act, P.L. 93–288, as amended) requires FEMA assistance to be delivered in an equitable manner without discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, nationality, sex, age, disability, language accessibility, or economic status.<sup>18</sup> The Strategic Plan recognizes that FEMA's programs are not being implemented equitably and asserts

<sup>6</sup>FEMA. (September 2, 2021). *FEMA Makes Changes to Individual Assistance Policies to Advance Equity for Disaster Survivors*. Available at [FEMA Makes Changes to Individual Assistance Policies to Advance Equity for Disaster Survivors / FEMA.gov](https://www.fema.gov/newsroom/fema-makes-changes-to-individual-assistance-policies-to-advance-equity-for-disaster-survivors)

<sup>7</sup>Washington Post. (September 2, 2021). *FEMA Changes Policy that Kept Thousands of Black Families from Receiving Disaster Aid*. Available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/09/02/fema-policy-change/>

<sup>8</sup>FEMA. (September 2, 2021). *FEMA Makes Changes to Individual Assistance Policies to Advance Equity for Disaster Survivors*. Available at [FEMA Makes Changes to Individual Assistance Policies to Advance Equity for Disaster Survivors / FEMA.gov](https://www.fema.gov/newsroom/fema-makes-changes-to-individual-assistance-policies-to-advance-equity-for-disaster-survivors)

<sup>9</sup>FEMA. (September 24, 2021). *FEMA Offers More Equitable Flood Insurance Rates Beginning Oct. 1*. Available at [FEMA Offers More Equitable Flood Insurance Rates Beginning Oct. 1 / FEMA.gov](https://www.fema.gov/newsroom/fema-offers-more-equitable-flood-insurance-rates-beginning-oct-1)

<sup>10</sup>Id.

<sup>11</sup>FEMA. (October 28, 2021). *FEMA Announces Initial Initiatives to Advance Climate Change Resilience*. Available at [FEMA Announces Initial Initiatives to Advance Climate Change Resilience / FEMA.gov](https://www.fema.gov/newsroom/fema-announces-initial-initiatives-to-advance-climate-change-resilience)

<sup>12</sup>Id.

<sup>13</sup>FEMA. (March 15, 2022). *FEMA Tops \$2 Billion of COVID-19 Funeral Assistance, Announces New Campaign to Increase Program Awareness*. Available at <https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20220315/fema-tops-2-billion-covid-19-funeral-assistance-announces-new-campaign>

<sup>14</sup>Id.

<sup>15</sup>FEMA. (December 2021). *2022–2016 FEMA Strategic Plan: Building the FEMA our Nation Needs and Deserves*. Available at [https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema\\_2022-2026-strategic-plan.pdf](https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_2022-2026-strategic-plan.pdf)

<sup>16</sup>Federal Register. (April 22, 2021). Request for Information on FEMA Programs, Regulations, and Policies. Available at <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/04/22/2021-08444-request-for-information-on-fema-programs-regulations-and-policies>

<sup>17</sup>Id.

<sup>18</sup>42 U.S.C. § 5121 et seq.

that the agency will work to achieve equity.<sup>19</sup> To meet this objective, FEMA plans to curate a workforce that reflects the nation’s diversity, remove barriers to FEMA programs so that they can be effectively accessed and leveraged by underserved communities, and allocate resources to eliminate disparate program outcomes.<sup>20</sup> FEMA’s Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) and Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) were selected during the interim implementation stage for Biden Administration’s pilot Justice 40 Initiative, which aims to provide at least 40 percent of program benefits to disadvantaged communities.<sup>21</sup>

*Goal 2: Lead the Whole Community in Climate Resilience*

Climate change and the increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters impacted an already prolonged amount of time it takes for communities to recover from a disaster.<sup>22</sup> FEMA plans to make the whole emergency management community more climate literate and resilient by building a foundational understanding of climate science and climate adaptation strategies, developing tools to anticipate climate risk, allocating resources informed by future risk estimates, and targeting investments to build resilience and enhance equity.<sup>23</sup> The Strategic Plan highlights that building to modern hazard resistant codes and standards is also key to avoiding future losses.<sup>24</sup>

Existing grant programs at FEMA help communities adapt to climate change and increase resilience including the BRIC program, which was allocated \$1 billion in funding in 2021, and the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), which received an additional \$3.46 billion in funding in 2021 due to the major disaster declarations issued for COVID–19.<sup>25</sup>

*Goal 3: Promote and Sustain a Ready FEMA and Prepared Nation*

The new frequency and intensity of natural disasters has stressed FEMA’s workforce.<sup>26</sup> The change in tempo was marked by the 2017 hurricane and wildfire seasons and has kept pace due to the nationwide COVID–19 major disaster declaration and other major hazard events such as the 2020 wildfire season and Hurricane Ida in 2021.<sup>27</sup> Prior to the 2017 disaster season FEMA was managing 26 emergency and major disaster declarations; by November 2020 it was managing 166 emergency and major disaster declarations.<sup>28</sup> To meet this challenge, FEMA plans to increase capacity at the community level by implementing revised training initiatives, recruiting a more diverse FEMA workforce, developing a comprehensive readiness framework, and improving interagency coordination to streamline the delivery of disaster assistance.<sup>29</sup>

*SUMMARY OF FEMA STAKEHOLDER PRIORITIES FOR 2022:*

On February 16, 2022, the Committee received testimony from emergency management stakeholders and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) during the hearing titled “FEMA priorities for 2022: Stakeholder Perspectives.”<sup>30</sup> The Committee received testimony from 16 additional stakeholder for the hearing record. The testimony provided recommendations to FEMA regarding all four phases of emergency management: mitigation, planning, response, and recovery.

<sup>19</sup> FEMA. (December 2021). *2022–2016 FEMA Strategic Plan: Building the FEMA our Nation Needs and Deserves*. Available at [https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema\\_2022-2026-strategic-plan.pdf](https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_2022-2026-strategic-plan.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Id.

<sup>21</sup> FEMA. (August 2021). *Where Equity Fits into the BRIC/FMA Program Design and Community Resilience*. Available at [https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema\\_equity-webinar-final\\_8-17-21.pdf](https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_equity-webinar-final_8-17-21.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), “Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters: Events.” Available at: <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/events>.

<sup>23</sup> FEMA. (August 2021). *Where Equity Fits into the BRIC/FMA Program Design and Community Resilience*. Available at [https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema\\_equity-webinar-final\\_8-17-21.pdf](https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_equity-webinar-final_8-17-21.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Id.

<sup>25</sup> CRS. (March 23, 2022). *Recent Funding Increases for FEMA Hazard Mitigation Assistance*. Available at <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN11733>

<sup>26</sup> FEMA. (December 2021). *2022–2016 FEMA Strategic Plan: Building the FEMA our Nation Needs and Deserves*. Available at [https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema\\_2022-2026-strategic-plan.pdf](https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_2022-2026-strategic-plan.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> Id.

<sup>28</sup> Id.

<sup>29</sup> Id.

<sup>30</sup> Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management. (February 16, 2022). Hearing: *FEMA Priorities for 2022: Stakeholder Perspectives*.

Testimony submitted by the National Emergency Management Association (NEMA) underscored that FEMA's programs, policies, and response strategies have not kept pace with the heightened threat of wildfire exacerbated by climate change and an expanding wildland urban interface.<sup>31</sup> Testimony submitted by the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) praised FEMA's priorities for the 2022–2026 Strategic plan and reiterated the need to consider equity in all FEMA programs.<sup>32</sup>

GAO's testimony identified four areas for improvement within FEMA: workforce management, long-term recovery, potential barriers to assistance and disparate recovery outcomes, and disaster resilience and mitigation.<sup>33</sup> GAO identified these priority areas using evidence it has gathered while drafting reports and recommendations during the 2015–2022 period.<sup>34</sup>

To improve workforce management, GAO recommends FEMA address staffing shortages, implement new training initiatives to produce a more qualified workforce, and expand its contracting workforce to improve the quality of recovery efforts.<sup>35</sup>

GAO asserted that FEMA's recovery programs are complex and slow to provide post-disaster assistance.<sup>36</sup> To improve recovery programs for communities and survivors, GAO recommends FEMA reconsider its Public Assistance (PA) reimbursement model, which most often requires state, local, Tribal, and territorial governments to provide upfront funding for recovery projects and seek reimbursement at a later date. This reimbursement model is a recovery barrier for communities that lack the upfront funds.<sup>37</sup> Stafford Sec. 428 authorizes FEMA to develop alternative procedures for PA for state, local, Tribal, territorial, or non-profit applicants and provide upfront funding for recovery projects based on a fixed-cost estimate.<sup>38</sup> However, the GAO's testimony reported that communities utilizing the alternative procedures authorized by Stafford Sec. 428 find the process of developing fixed-cost estimates to be difficult and lengthy.<sup>39</sup>

GAO also recommended that FEMA consider equity across all its programs by identifying potential disaster recovery access barriers and disparate outcomes, prioritizing flood map investments for vulnerable populations, and developing specialized disaster assistance for older and disabled individuals. To address equity challenges in FEMA's IA Program, GAO recommends the agency simplify the Individual Housing Program (IHP) application process and make it more accessible to low-income and vulnerable populations.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, to build resilience prior to disaster and reduce the need for complex recovery efforts, GAO recommends that FEMA update flood maps and flood risk products.<sup>41</sup> To ensure all small, rural, and underserved communities can access hazard mitigation grant funds, GAO recommends that FEMA reduce the complexity and length of hazard mitigation grant applications.<sup>42</sup>

## CONCLUSION

FEMA has been tested in recent years by COVID–19 and by disasters that are becoming more costly and frequent.<sup>43</sup> The FEMA Administrator leads the federal government's crisis management agency during a time of overlapping management and mission challenges. This hearing provides the subcommittee an opportunity to

<sup>31</sup> Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management. (February 16, 2022). Hearing: *FEMA Priorities for 2022: Stakeholder Perspectives*. Testimony submitted by Erica Bornemann.

<sup>32</sup> Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management. (February 16, 2022). Hearing: *FEMA Priorities for 2022: Stakeholder Perspectives*. Testimony submitted by Carolyn Harshman.

<sup>33</sup> Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management. (February 16, 2022). Hearing: *FEMA Priorities for 2022: Stakeholder Perspectives*. Testimony submitted by Chris Currie.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.*

<sup>35</sup> *Id.*

<sup>36</sup> *Id.*

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*

<sup>38</sup> Section 428, *Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Stafford Act)* P.L. 93–288, as amended)

<sup>39</sup> Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management. (February 16, 2022). Hearing: *FEMA Priorities for 2022: Stakeholder Perspectives*. Testimony submitted by Chris Currie.

<sup>40</sup> *Id.*

<sup>41</sup> *Id.*

<sup>42</sup> *Id.*

<sup>43</sup> National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), "Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters: Events." Available at: <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/events>.



hear directly from Administrator Criswell how the administration will achieve the Strategic Plan goals and meet these challenges.

WITNESS LIST

- The Honorable Deanne Criswell, Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), U.S. Department of Homeland Security



## FEMA PRIORITIES FOR 2022 AND THE 2022–2026 STRATEGIC PLAN

TUESDAY, APRIL 5, 2022

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC  
BUILDINGS, AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT,  
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE,  
*Washington, DC.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:05 a.m. in room 2167 Rayburn House Office Building and via Zoom, Hon. Dina Titus (Chair of the subcommittee) presiding.

Members present in person: Ms. Titus, Mr. DeFazio, Mr. Webster of Florida, Mr. Massie, Mr. Larsen of Washington, and Mr. Graves of Louisiana.

Members present remotely: Ms. Norton, Ms. Davids of Kansas, Mrs. Napolitano, Ms. Van Duyne, and Mr. Stanton.

Ms. TITUS. The subcommittee will come to order.

I ask unanimous consent that the chair be authorized to declare a recess at any time during this hearing.

Without objection, so ordered.

I also ask unanimous consent that Members not on the subcommittee be permitted to sit with the subcommittee at today's hearing and ask questions.

Without objection, so ordered.

As a reminder, please keep your microphone muted unless speaking. Should I hear any inadvertent background noise, I will request that the Member please mute their microphone.

To insert a document into the record, please have your staff email it to DocumentsT&I@mail.house.gov.

I want to thank our Administrator, Ms. Criswell, for joining us today to discuss FEMA's priorities for 2022, and the Agency's 2022 through 2026 strategic plan.

Since you were last here in June of 2021, this subcommittee has heard from several panels of witnesses that climate change, severe related weather events, and development in high-risk areas have changed the emergency management landscape. Today's disasters cause more damage, have greater impacts on communities, and require more time and money to recover.

These new challenges to the recovery process make it imperative that FEMA cut the redtape within its assistance programs and deliver resources to individuals and communities in need in a timely fashion and in an equitable way.

I continue to hear from stakeholders and witnesses that bureaucracy is adding inordinate complexity to the recovery process. As

FEMA processes a record number of project worksheets and a multitude of Individual Assistance applications, it must become a priority to identify commonsense ways to simplify these pipelines.

Make no mistake, I am impressed by the work that the men and women of FEMA have done to rise to the challenge time and time again, especially over the past 5 years, as the workforce has been stretched to its limits. Now is the time to provide reinforcements so that FEMA can meet its present and future mission.

Last month, I introduced bipartisan legislation designed to ensure FEMA has the tools it needs to recruit and retain qualified workers for its cadre of disaster reservists.

The GAO and the RAND Corporation have stated that providing FEMA's workforce access to adequate protections, training, and benefits will enhance the Agency's capabilities and create better outcomes for disaster survivors and communities.

The unprecedented number of emergency and disaster declarations and capacity challenges burdening FEMA today must also inspire us to make proactive investments that will reduce the impact of future disasters and protect our communities. Mitigation is a proven way to save lives and property, and it is cost effective. I strongly support expanding funding for mitigation projects at the local and individual level.

I hope the House will take a positive step today by passing the bipartisan Resilient AMERICA Act, which I was pleased to support with Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, and subcommittee Ranking Member Webster. This legislation will boost resources for predisaster mitigation, including assistance for communities interested in updating their building codes.

It will also establish a pilot block grant program so that States interested in assisting residents in the wilderness-urban interface can enhance defensible space around their property or install fire-resistant building materials.

Mitigation cannot be effective unless it is fairly distributed across all communities. I am concerned about stakeholder feedback that FEMA's mitigation assistance programs are only reaching the largest and best resourced communities. The complexity of the hazard mitigation application process makes it nearly impossible for small, disadvantaged, and rural communities to successfully access these funds.

I appreciate your attention to a letter sent by this subcommittee's leadership which posed a series of questions regarding FEMA's efforts to streamline the hazard mitigation grants process. And I hope that implementing reforms to make this process more accessible will continue to be a shared priority of the committee and the Agency so we move towards more equitable recovery programs.

Administrator, I want to thank you for your work, what you have done to guide FEMA in a positive direction by acknowledging and addressing the impacts of climate change, prioritizing equity, and investing in mitigation and resilience. We look forward to your testimony and discussing how this committee can work with you to make additional progress in supporting disaster survivors in 2022 and beyond.

[Ms. Titus' prepared statement follows:]

—————

**Prepared Statement of Hon. Dina Titus, a Representative in Congress from the State of Nevada, and Chair, Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management**

I'd like to thank Administrator Criswell for joining us to discuss the Federal Emergency Management Agency's priorities for 2022 and the Agency's 2022–2026 Strategic Plan.

Since our last hearing together in June of 2021, this subcommittee has heard from several panels of witnesses that climate change, the related severe weather events, and development in high-risk areas have changed the emergency management landscape.

Today's disasters cause more damage, have greater impacts on communities, and require more time to recover. These new challenges to the recovery process make it imperative that FEMA cut the red tape within its assistance programs and deliver resources to individuals and communities in need.

I continue to hear from stakeholders and witnesses that bureaucracy is adding inordinate complexity to the recovery process. As FEMA processes a record number of project worksheets and multitude of Individual Assistance applications, it must be a priority to identify commonsense ways to simplify these assistance pipelines.

Make no mistake, I am impressed by the work the women and men at FEMA have done to rise to the challenge time and time again, especially over the past five years as FEMA's workforce has been stretched to its limits. Now is the time to provide reinforcements so that FEMA can meet its present mission.

Last month I introduced bipartisan legislation designed to ensure FEMA has the tools it needs to recruit and retain qualified workers for its cadre of disaster reservists. The GAO and the RAND corporation have stated that providing FEMA's workforce access to adequate protections, training, and benefits will enhance the agency's capabilities and create better outcomes for disaster survivors and communities.

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I hope the House will take a positive step today by passing the bipartisan Resilient America Act, which I led with Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, and the Subcommittee's Ranking Member Mr. Webster. This legislation will boost resources for pre-disaster mitigation including: assistance for communities interested in updating their building codes to reflect the latest hazard resistant designs, and establishing a pilot block grant program so that states interested in assisting residents in the wildland urban interface can enhance defensible space around their property or install fire-resistant building materials to reduce risks.

Mitigation cannot be effective unless it is fairly distributed across all communities. I am concerned with stakeholder feedback that FEMA's mitigation assistance programs are only reaching the largest and best-resourced communities. The complexity of the hazard mitigation application processes makes it nearly impossible for small, disadvantaged, and rural communities to successfully access these funds.

I appreciated your attention to a letter sent by this subcommittee's leadership, which posed a series of questions regarding FEMA's efforts to streamline the hazard mitigation grants process. I hope that implementing reforms to make this process more accessible will continue to be a shared priority for Congress and the agency.

Administrator, I thank you for the work you have done to guide FEMA in a positive direction by acknowledging and addressing the impacts of climate change, prioritizing equity, and investing in mitigation and resilience. I look forward to your testimony and discussing how this committee can work with you to make additional progress on supporting disaster survivors in 2022 and beyond.

Ms. TITUS. I would now like to welcome our—[discussion off the record]—I would like to now welcome our ranking member, Mr. Webster, for his opening comments.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Thank you, Chair Titus. I want to welcome and thank the Administrator for coming today.

FEMA has a mission critical to our Nation and my home State, Florida. And you, Administrator Criswell, despite being in the Department of Homeland Security, are the principal advisor to the

President when it comes to disasters. The congressional review of the response to Hurricane Katrina indicated how critical it is for the lead emergency manager, not the Secretary of Homeland Security, to advise the President. And that experience and knowledge is needed even more today.

In recent years, we have seen the number and cost of disasters increase—from hurricanes, flooding, ice storms, tornadoes, other things, and wildfires. Ultimately, we all must work towards solutions that will lower costs and save lives through mitigation and preparation. But we also need to look at how declared disasters can be closed out faster so FEMA, State, and local resources can focus more quickly on preparing for the next disaster.

The only sub to that is in regard to flooding. In our area, the floods don't come for maybe a month or two afterwards, when the crest builds. So, we should be fast, but not too fast.

Building in mitigation has been a bipartisan priority of this committee. Studies have proven that every dollar spent, invested upfront, can avoid \$4 to \$11 in disaster damages. While the committee has passed legislation that supports this goal, it does not help if the funding does not get out the door in a timely manner. While I appreciate the importance of many of the objectives in FEMA's strategic plan, in order to achieve these goals, it is important for us to identify concrete steps in streamlining FEMA's processes.

It seems every time we pass reforms intended to make the process more accessible and faster, redtape creeps back in, or applicants in one State are told something different than the ones in another State. In February, we received testimony from various stakeholders and the GAO detailing ongoing challenges in FEMA programs. A common theme in much of the feedback related to the cumbersome process, inconsistent decisions, and confusing communications. Unfortunately, these have been persistent issues. We need to work to find solutions, and solutions that are sustainable, clear to applicants, and consistently applied.

I look forward to hearing what you have to say about FEMA priorities and the strategic plan, and how it can help improve our Federal emergency management system.

[Mr. Webster of Florida's prepared statement follows:]

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**Prepared Statement of Hon. Daniel Webster, a Representative in Congress from the State of Florida, and Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management**

Thank you, Chair Titus. I want to welcome and thank Administrator Criswell for being here today.

FEMA has a mission critical to our Nation and my home state of Florida. And Administrator Criswell, despite being in the Department of Homeland Security, is the principal advisor to the President when it comes to disasters. A congressional review of the response to Hurricane Katrina indicated how critical it is for the lead emergency manager, not the Secretary of Homeland Security, to advise the President. And that experience and knowledge is needed even more today.

In recent years, we have seen the number and costs of disasters increase—from hurricanes, flooding, and ice storms to tornados and wildfires. Ultimately, we all must work towards solutions that will lower those costs and save lives through mitigation and preparation. But we also need to look at how declared disasters can be closed out faster so FEMA, state, and local resources can focus more quickly on preparing for the next disaster.

Building-in mitigation has been a bipartisan priority of this Committee. Studies have proven that with every \$1 invested upfront, we can avoid \$4 to \$11 dollars in disaster damages. While the Committee has passed legislation that supports this goal, it does not help if funding does not get out the door in a timely manner. While I appreciate the importance of many of the objectives in FEMA's Strategic Plan, in order to achieve those goals, it's important for us to identify concrete steps in streamlining FEMA's processes.

It seems every time we pass reforms intended to make the process more accessible and faster, red tape creeps back in or applicants in one State are told something different than those in another state. In February, we received testimony from various stakeholders and the GAO detailing ongoing challenges in FEMA programs. A common theme in much of the feedback related to the cumbersome process, inconsistencies in decisions, and confusing communication. Unfortunately, these have been persistent issues. We need to work to find solutions, and solutions that are sustainable, clear to applicants, and consistently applied. I look forward to hearing from the Administrator on how FEMA's priorities and strategic plan can help improve our federal emergency management system.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Thank you, and I yield back.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Webster. I now recognize the chairman of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Mr. DeFazio.

Mr. DEFAZIO. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thanks for holding this timely and important hearing, and thanks to Administrator Criswell for taking the time to be with us today.

It's critical that we discuss FEMA's short-term and long-term plans to meet challenges posed by an evolving disaster landscape. Natural disasters have become more frequent, more intense, and, of course, more damaging and costly. And they are having a greater impact on communities across the Nation. And it is critical that FEMA have the capacity to respond to this growing challenge.

And to meet this goal, I believe FEMA needs an expanded workforce. We are also working on how we can help with reservists who get called up. And we have to be able to be certain that your programs are implemented as effectively, efficiently, equitably, with as little redtape as possible, but protecting against the potential for fraud and abuse.

My State, my home State, Oregon, we've got great natural beauty, but we also have a great risk of natural disasters. Flooding, wildfires, the potential for a massive, once-in-350-to-500-year earthquake at 9 on the Richter scale, which would bring tsunamis. And then, of course, we had the unprecedented extreme heat events last summer, which caused mortality in Portland, the second least air-conditioned city in the country, because we never needed it before, and Seattle. We had temperatures that were so far above the norm, it couldn't have happened—there is a consensus of scientists—without the impacts of climate change, and it will happen more frequently.

So, new challenges for FEMA and things that we need to prepare for, as the Chair mentioned, with mitigation in advance.

You have been stretched. And I think the whole committee recognizes this. Your workers have done incredible things with, in my opinion, inadequate resources. And, we want to hear more about your 2022–2026 strategic plan, and how you intend to expand your capacity and be able to deal with these disasters as they happen.

I think you have been doing a great job at an Agency which did fall into a little bit of neglect during the last administration. You

have taken us through the pandemic, a whole different and new challenge. Hurricane Ida, Kentucky tornadoes, while you are reforming programs at the same time, which is long overdue.

I am pleased you have made equity a priority.

And the Agency continues to seek innovative ways to restructure its programs, in particular the issue of documentation. I first ran across this as a very significant issue in Puerto Rico, when I was on a congressional trip down there after the disastrous hurricane, where the courthouses were wiped out. People had no way of providing the documentation that was initially being demanded, and they were all routinely being denied. And we have taken some steps to mitigate that, but we need to do better.

We had a similar instance in southern Oregon with a devastating wildfire which wiped out a number of trailer parks, similar issues regarding lack of documentation because their house trailer was parked in an a trailer park. We have to be able to deal with these things. Again, we always have to be wary and afraid of the potential for fraud and abuse, but we don't have to get to the point where we are disqualifying people who should be and are eligible and have gotten lost in the bureaucratic quagmire being initially denied, not knowing how to re-apply, or what other documentation they might be able to provide. And I think you have made some strides there, but I think more needs to be done.

As the Chair mentioned, resilience and mitigation are absolutely key. I mean, the cost-benefit ratio is extraordinary. And some of these programs—in particular, mitigation—are not tremendously accessible to small, rural, and disadvantaged communities who lack the expertise of a sophisticated management staff. We need to be able to figure out ways to help them better, apply and understand what they could be eligible for in the wake of disasters or a predisaster, in terms of mitigation and planning.

There is \$1.7 billion that could yet be committed for predisaster mitigation from the COVID-19 declarations alone, and I am hopeful that we will find ways to usefully invest those funds.

Thanks again for being with us today. Thanks again for your work at the Agency, your expertise, and I look forward to your remarks.

[Mr. DeFazio's prepared statement follows:]

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**Prepared Statement of Hon. Peter A. DeFazio, a Representative in Congress from the State of Oregon, and Chair, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure**

Thank you, Chair Titus, and thank you to Administrator Criswell for taking the time to be with us today.

There is no better time than now to discuss FEMA's short-term and long-term plans to meet the challenges posed by an evolving disaster landscape. Natural disasters have become more costly and are having greater impact upon communities across the nation. It is critical that FEMA is equipped with the capacity to respond. To meet this goal, I believe FEMA must expand its workforce and ensure its programs are implemented as effectively, efficiently, and equitably as possible. This mission is critical since the quality of FEMA's programs significantly impact disaster survivors' recovery.

Oregon is home to a lot of natural beauty, and unfortunately, this beauty also comes at the price of great risk of natural disasters. My constituents are vulnerable to hazards including flooding, wildfires, earthquakes, tsunamis, and extreme heat just to name a few, and climate change is causing these disasters to impact the



state in unprecedented ways. In 2020, wildfires damaged more than 5,000 structures and forced tens of thousands of Oregonians to evacuate. In 2021, record breaking heatwaves in Oregon posed a major health risk to my constituents and tragically caused over 90 deaths.

Unprecedented hazard events have not been confined to Oregon. The record-breaking cost of the 2017 and 2018 disaster seasons and the nationwide COVID-19 disaster declarations have stretched FEMA to its limit. FEMA's 2022-2026 Strategic Plan acknowledges this challenge and I look forward to discussing how FEMA intends to expand capacity and adapt its programs to ensure disaster survivors receive the quality assistance they deserve.

I am proud of the work FEMA has achieved under your leadership. You have guided the agency through a pandemic, responded to complex disasters such as Hurricane Ida and the Kentucky tornadoes, while simultaneously implementing reforms that make FEMA's programs more equitable. It is refreshing that this Administration has made equity a priority and that the Agency continues to seek innovative ways to restructure its programs.

I was especially pleased that the agency will now accept additional forms of documentation to verify the occupancy and ownership requirements of disaster survivors seeking Individual Assistance. This policy change has made Individual Assistance more accessible to underserved communities and homeowners that may not have access to a deed or formal proof of home ownership. However, there is still a lot of work remaining to fully incorporate equity into FEMA's programs. I fully support these efforts and am open to considering statutory changes.

Reforming FEMA's response and recovery programs is not enough. Expanding mitigation and resilience efforts must be at the forefront of any conversation regarding the increasing frequency, intensity, and cost of natural disasters. Time and again it has been proven that mitigation is a commonsense, cost-effective way to save lives and property. That's why I strongly support finding ways to increase funding for mitigation and resilience projects.

I echo Chair Titus' remarks that FEMA's mitigation programs must become more accessible to small, rural, and disadvantaged communities. I would also like to see FEMA use its full authorities to place money in the pre-disaster mitigation fund. At present, there's another \$1.7 billion in authority that can be committed to pre-disaster mitigation from the COVID-19 declarations alone.

Thank you again for your time, testimony, and expertise. I look forward to continuing our work together to drive needed reforms inside FEMA and will work to ensure you have the authorities, resources, and direction to achieve your goals and the agency's mission.

Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. DEFAZIO. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would now like to welcome our witness today, the Honorable Deanne Criswell, who is the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Thank you for coming and sharing with us your plans for FEMA. We all look forward to hearing from you.

Without objection, our witness' full statement will be included in the record.

Administrator Criswell, you have the floor.

**TESTIMONY OF HON. DEANNE CRISWELL, ADMINISTRATOR,  
FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY**

Ms. CRISWELL. Thank you very much. Good morning, Chair Titus, Ranking Member Webster, and members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

The field of emergency management is at a pivotal moment. We are seeing tremendous change in the landscape of risk and in our professional roles.

While our mission has not changed, our operating environment has: 10 years ago, we managed an average of 108 disasters a year;

today, we are managing 311. That includes the ongoing response to COVID-19.

The changing climate is the biggest crisis that is facing our Nation. It is making natural disasters more frequent, more intense, and more destructive. And this pattern will continue for the foreseeable future. And at the same time, structural inequities in our society are compounding the impacts of disasters for our historically underserved communities. The 2022-2026 FEMA strategic plan identifies three ambitious goals that we must achieve to address these challenges.

First, we must instill equity as a foundation of emergency management. It is important to recognize disasters affect individuals and communities differently. We must commit ourselves to reducing barriers to access and commit to developing equitable outcomes for all survivors. We must put people first and reduce the burdens to individuals and communities by making our programs simpler, more accessible, and more user friendly.

We have already made important changes to the way we provide assistance to make this true. For instance, some homeowners had difficulty proving they owned their homes if their property had been handed down informally through the years. We expanded the types of ownership documentation that we can accept, like receipts for major repairs or improvements, court documents, public officials' letters, mobile park letters, and even self-certification for mobile homes and travel trailers as a last resort.

In addition, FEMA has changed the way we calculate the threshold for property loss to qualify for our direct housing program, such as a trailer or a mobile home. The change resulted in more than 1,400 families receiving assistance who would not have been considered for direct housing in the past. That means 1,400 families with a roof over their head, a bed to sleep in, and a stove to cook with.

These are just a few examples of where our "people first" approach has made a difference, but we can and will do more.

We also know that the more our workforce resembles the Nation we serve, the better we will be at serving our Nation. This is why our strategic plan focuses our recruiting efforts to reach individuals from underrepresented communities, including through partnering with organizations like Historically Black Colleges and Universities and other minority-serving institutions. Our goal is to create hiring pipelines from these institutions into the field of emergency management, opening new opportunities for underrepresented communities who may not see themselves reflected in today's workforce.

As you know, FEMA is not just a response and recovery Agency. One of my highest priorities is to focus equally on what we can do on the front end before a disaster. This is why our second strategic goal is to lead the whole of community in climate resilience.

We must recognize that we are facing a climate crisis. FEMA can educate not only our own staff, but also the Nation, about the impacts of our changing climate. We must integrate future conditions into our planning efforts. We must think bigger about how we approach mitigation and shift our projects to those with community-wide impact. And, as with disaster relief, we must eliminate bar-

riers to underserved communities, the barriers they face to receive mitigation assistance.

I would like to thank Congress for passing the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. This legislation provides significant funding to establish revolving loan funds under the STORM Act, as well as for FEMA's other hazard mitigation assistance grant programs. These investments will only grow in importance as climate change continues to alter the landscape of risk facing emergency managers across our country.

I am also committed to making sure FEMA's workforce is well equipped to advise our partners on the best ways to build climate-resilient communities. I am directing a new collaborative steering group comprised of FEMA leadership to begin a multiyear initiative to incorporate the dynamics of a changing climate into relevant training, planning, grant eligibility, and exercises as appropriate. FEMA program offices and the U.S. Fire Administration will also collaborate to strengthen the capability of emergency management partners to advance these critical issues within their pre- and post-disaster work.

Our third strategic goal is to promote and sustain a ready FEMA and a prepared Nation. The increase in frequency, severity, and complexity of disasters has heightened demands on FEMA's workforce and on the first responder workforces across our Nation. To rise to this challenge, FEMA must expand its approach to Agency readiness and to national preparedness. We need a better understanding of the value and skill set emergency managers bring to bear.

We also need to standardize emergency management career paths, and FEMA's educational institutions are going to lead that effort, making training available to emergency managers anywhere they are at any time in their careers.

And FEMA is improving its ability to meet the increasingly complex missions beyond the typical Stafford Act emergencies and disasters. I want to thank Congress for including funding in the recent omnibus for a non-Stafford Incident Management Assistance Team.

We are also bolstering the support staff who enable our Stafford Act disaster workforce to better meet the challenges of the year-long operational tempo. This includes procurement specialists who allow us to actually mobilize assistance, computer specialists who facilitate data and information sharing, those who ensure civil rights are protected in all activities, and the personnel necessary to train the workforce, manage operations, and focus on employee wellness.

Since I last appeared before this subcommittee in June of last year, FEMA has been tested on many fronts, and our people have risen to the occasion. As we look ahead, the FEMA strategic plan is ambitious, but it is equal to the challenges we face.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to testify today.

[Ms. Criswell's prepared statement follows:]

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**Prepared Statement of Hon. Deanne Criswell, Administrator, Federal  
Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Department of Homeland Security**

Chair Titus, Ranking Member Webster, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today about the 2022–2026 FEMA Strategic Plan, and our ongoing efforts to fundamentally reshape and strengthen FEMA’s abilities to help people before, during, and after disasters.

The field of emergency management is at a pivotal moment. We are seeing tremendous change in the landscape of risk and in our professional roles. While our mission has not changed, our operating environment has. Ten years ago, we managed an average of 108 disasters a year. Today, we are managing 311—including the ongoing response to the COVID–19 pandemic. The most recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is very clear that physical changes in our climate—heat, cold, rain, drought, snow, wind, coastal flooding, and more—are irreversible over hundreds to thousands of years.

The changing climate is the biggest crisis facing our nation. It is making natural disasters more frequent, more intense, and more destructive, and this pattern will continue for the foreseeable future. At the same time, structural inequities in our society are compounding the impacts of disasters for historically underserved communities. Left unaddressed, these twin challenges pose unacceptable risks to the nation.

The 2022–2026 FEMA Strategic Plan identifies three ambitious goals we must achieve to address these challenges.

First, we must instill equity as a foundation of emergency management. It is important we recognize disasters affect individuals and communities differently. We must commit ourselves to reducing barriers to access and commit to delivering equitable outcomes for all survivors. Disaster survivors have already experienced their worst day, and we must ensure our policies and programs meet them where they are and provide support and nothing less. Systems which create barriers and result in inequitable outcomes serve no one, especially in times of crisis. We must put people first and reduce the burdens to individuals and communities by making our programs simpler, more accessible, and more user-friendly.

We have already made important changes to the way we provide assistance to make this true. For instance, some homeowners had difficulty proving they owned their homes if their property had been handed down informally through the years. We took action by expanding the types of ownership documentation we can accept, including documents like receipts for major repairs or improvements, court documents, public officials’ letters, mobile home park letters, and even applicant self-certification for mobile homes and travel trailers as a last resort. In addition, FEMA has changed the way we calculate the threshold for property losses to qualify for our Direct Housing program (such as a trailer or mobile home). Our goal—ensure equitable damage evaluations regardless of the amount of damage to the home. Changing the calculation of the threshold from a fixed dollar floor of \$17,000 to a simpler \$12 per square foot, resulted in more than 1,400 families receiving assistance who would not have been considered for direct housing in the past. That means 1,400 families with a roof over their head, beds to sleep in, and a stove to cook with. This change especially made a difference for survivors with lower value homes. These are a few examples of where our people first approach has made a difference. But we can do more. We will do more.

We also know, the more our workforce resembles the nation we serve, the better we will be at serving our nation. Which is why our Strategic Plan focuses our recruiting efforts to reach individuals from underrepresented communities, including through partnering with organizations like Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and the American Indian Higher Education Consortium of Tribal Colleges and Universities and other Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). Our goal is to create hiring pipelines from these institutions into the field of emergency management, opening new opportunities for underrepresented communities who may not see themselves reflected in today’s workforce, and as a result, may have been dissuaded from joining the emergency management profession.

As you know, FEMA is not just a response and recovery agency. One of my highest priorities is to focus equally on what we can do on the front end, before a disaster—as this is often as important, if not more important than what we do when a disaster strikes.

Which is why our second strategic goal is to lead whole of community in climate resilience. We must recognize we are facing a climate crisis. FEMA can educate not only our own staff, but also the nation about the impacts our changing climate poses, and how this will influence the work we do as emergency managers. We must integrate future conditions into our planning efforts. We must think bigger about

how we approach mitigation and shift our projects to those with community-wide impact, and, as with disaster relief, we must eliminate barriers underserved communities face to receive mitigation assistance.

I would like to thank Congress for working with the Biden-Harris Administration to provide FEMA with additional resources to reduce the impact of climate change by passing the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. This legislation provides significant funding to establish revolving loan funds under the STORM Act, as well as for FEMA's other Hazard Mitigation Assistance grant programs. These investments will only grow in importance as climate change continues to alter the landscape of risk facing emergency managers across the country. Which is why we've made resources available, such as new Direct Technical Assistance, for local communities to provide support for both project and application-specific needs, as well as community-wide resilience needs.

I am also committed to making sure FEMA's workforce is well-equipped to advise our partners on the best ways to build climate resilient communities. I am directing a new collaborative steering group comprised of leadership from FEMA's program offices to begin a multi-year initiative to incorporate the dynamics of a changing climate into relevant training, planning, grant eligibility, and exercises, as appropriate. FEMA program offices and the U.S. Fire Administration will also collaborate to strengthen the capability of state, local, territorial, and tribal nation partners to advance these critical issues within their pre- and post-disaster work. I believe a more climate literate workforce which considers the impacts of future risks in disaster planning and understands how the natural world, in conjunction with our current systems, can help or burden survivors, will position FEMA to truly lead the way on hazard mitigation and resilience.

Our third strategic goal is to promote and sustain a ready FEMA and prepared nation. The increase in frequency, severity, and complexity of disasters has heightened demands on FEMA's workforce and on the first responder workforces in every state, tribal nation, county, and city in the nation which comprise the broader emergency management community.

To rise to this challenge, FEMA must expand its approach to agency readiness and to national preparedness. We will accomplish this in the following ways. First, we need a better understanding of the value and skill set emergency managers bring to bear, in other words, a clear standard definition of the competencies, required to become a qualified emergency manager.

Second, like other professions, emergency management must standardize its career paths, and FEMA's educational institutions will lead the effort to advance the emergency management profession by supporting curricula for comprehensive emergency management training, education, and professional development for our partners across the nation by making training available to emergency managers anywhere they are, at any time in their careers. We are modernizing their operational design so the nation's federal, state, local, territorial, tribal nation, non-governmental organization, and private sector emergency managers can meet the risks posed by increasing hazards, and obtain the training required to become certified within the National Qualification System.

Third, FEMA is improving our ability to meet the increasing number of current and emergent threats requiring federal support. As FEMA is uniquely positioned to provide incident management and coordination support for increasingly complex missions beyond typical Stafford Act emergencies and disasters, we are envisioning, planning, and preparing for incidents which do not fall into common disaster categories. I want to thank Congress for including funding in the recent Omnibus for a non-Stafford Incident Management Assistance Team (IMAT). Having this capability will help us more rapidly and effectively provide incident management support for these emerging threats.

We are also in the process of looking at the architecture of our Stafford Act disaster workforce to better meet the challenges of the yearlong operational tempo which is our new reality. As FEMA's incident management and incident support workforce continues to grow, we are prioritizing the growth of the support workforce which enables them, such as the procurement specialists needed to execute the contracts and mission assignments, which allows us to actually mobilize assistance; the computer specialist who facilitate data and information sharing within FEMA's IT infrastructure; those who ensure civil rights are protected in all activities; and the personnel necessary to train the workforce, manage operations, and the experts who focus on employee wellness.

The last group is so critical. Dealing with an unrelenting pace of a year-round cycle of disasters and crisis takes its toll on the FEMA team. To be ready for the next disaster, whenever it comes, we must look out for the physical, emotional and mental health of our people. We are looking at our existing flexibilities to ensure

that our people can rest and reset, and take care of themselves and their families. We cannot do what we do without our people. Since I last appeared before this Subcommittee in June of last year, FEMA has been tested on many fronts, and our people have risen to the occasion. Their adaptability, dedication, and willingness to do the hard work is unquestionable and unbelievable.

In closing, the 2022–2026 FEMA Strategic Plan is ambitious, but it is equal to the challenges we face. I look forward to all we will accomplish together as we continue to build a more ready and resilient nation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I look forward to your questions.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you very much for being here, Administrator. We will now move on to Member questions. Each Member will be recognized for 5 minutes, and I will start by recognizing Chairman DeFazio.

Mr. DEFAZIO. Thanks, Madam Chair.

Madam Administrator, I am noting that we haven't made a lot of progress on implementing a national set of reasonable and prudent alternatives to get the National Flood Insurance Program into compliance with the Endangered Species Act. This is particularly problematic because of litigation filed and settled under the Obama administration.

Washington State has one set of standards, and then, with further litigation, Oregon is expected to adopt a much more extreme and unique set of standards. And there is also potential for litigation in Florida and elsewhere, ending up with a nationwide patchwork disqualifying people from access to Federal flood insurance in ways that are not reasonable. We need a Federal standard.

Just quickly, an example, when I looked at the potential impacts of the so-called settlement for Oregon, I held a press conference in front of the Coos Bay World newspaper, which is about 8 blocks from the 101 Highway, which then, on the other side is Coos Bay, and that is considered critical salmon habitat. And any redevelopment of that area would be prohibited from having Federal flood insurance. What kind of progress are we making on this? What kind of timeline do you have to get this in place, to have a nationwide standard for the whole country?

Ms. CRISWELL. Chair DeFazio, thank you for raising this very important issue. I know that this is incredibly important to you in Oregon, but especially as we look at the way we are going to implement projects across the country. And there are a lot of unique challenges that you are specifically experiencing in Oregon.

I know that my team has been continuing to work on this issue. I believe that they have briefed your staff recently on some of the progress that has been made. But I am happy to follow up with my team and to meet with your staff to see exactly where we are at in this process.

Mr. DEFAZIO. Yes, because many of our cities and counties are about to go through a very expensive process to revise their mandated State land-use plans in order to be in compliance. Once they begin that process, I mean, they are going to be spending money and resources they could better use elsewhere if suddenly we are going to be looking at a new national standard, versus the unique standard that has been established for Oregon. So, I would appreciate that.

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, sir.

Mr. DEFAZIO. And then the other question is—and this may be something that the committee needs to address in conjunction with you—the current post-disaster assistance model requires survivors to file applications with multiple agencies. And then, if you have filed over here and you get assistance there, and then you file over here you are disqualified. And then sometimes over here they want the money back. And over here you could have—it gets incredibly complicated. And I know it involves SBA and HUD.

Are we looking at memorandums of understanding, or any way to streamline this in the future?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, absolutely, sir. The work that we do in coordination with SBA and HUD is incredibly important to help survivors, especially as they are beginning to go through the process and try to get back on their feet. I know that it is frustrating for them to have to put information into several different applications.

What we have been doing here recently is—and I think we are getting closer to this goal—is that we have been working on ways to share our data better across the platforms. So, the information that they put in with one application, say with FEMA, then would transfer automatically over to SBA or HUD.

I think the data-sharing piece is one of our biggest challenges that we are facing right now, and rightly so, with all the privacy concerns that are out there. And we are making steps to get closer on that. And it is—certainly happy to provide any followup information on the specifics of where we are.

Mr. DEFAZIO. OK. And if the committee needs to be helpful with those other committees of jurisdiction here, I am certain that the chair would be willing to hear from the Agency on any assistance you need, as would I, and I am sure would other members of the committee.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. Yes. As a matter of fact, I have been talking to some people from the industry who would like to put together a roundtable, which would be a more informal way for them to have input, for you to address some of these issues, and for the committee to be there in less structured, kind of 5-minute intervals. So, we are working on setting that up. So, we will certainly keep you posted.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We will now recognize Mr. Webster for 5 minutes.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Thank you, Chair.

Administrator Criswell, the GAO has highlighted that the significant percentage of FEMA workforce deployed is not properly trained. Well, the people who work for FEMA joined FEMA to help other people. And if they don't know how, it is going to be pretty hard to carry out their duties. Can you give just some examples or steps you are taking to make sure that the FEMA workforce is properly trained?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, absolutely, Ranking Member. The GAO report came out with three recommendations, and we concurred with all three of those recommendations.

The workforce, again, it was one of my priorities as I was going through the confirmation process, and it has been embedded into our strategic plan going forward. The women and the men that

work here at FEMA, they are some of the best in the business. And you are right, they are passionate about what they do, because they do get to help people before, during, and after disasters.

And we have taken steps in regards to the three recommendations. In fact, I think we closed out the first two, or I have asked to close out the first two recommendations in that GAO report.

Specifically to the one regarding the training, we have implemented new ways to encourage our reservist workforce to accomplish the training during their off-duty hours, in addition to the times when they are deployed. And we have also implemented a new reservist—let me look up here—the reservist performance management directive, so we can help track the level of training and the level of performance that our reservists are accomplishing on their disasters to better identify any gaps and areas that we still need to improve, and things that we may need to put in place to continue to help our employees get the level of training that they need to perform their jobs.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. So, do you have also trouble finding people to join up with the workforce?

Ms. CRISWELL. Recruitment and retention is one of the things that—again, one of our biggest priorities. I think our focus right now, sir, is focusing on recruiting a diverse workforce, as I mentioned in my opening statement, reaching out to Historically Black Colleges and Universities and other institutions to help build that workforce.

I think, as we go through—and I would like to thank Congress, specifically Chair Titus and Congressman Katko, for introducing legislation that mirrors what the Senate has put forth that would give FEMA reservist USERRA protections. I think having that type of protection going forward is going to be transformational in how we can recruit our workforce, and really build the level of expertise to meet the growing challenges.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. So, consistency and coordination across Federal disaster assistance programs has been an ongoing issue. Some stakeholders have proposed a universal application for all disaster programs. What are your thoughts on that kind of solution, so that if you ask one State and another State it would be the same advice, same procedure, same stepping stone?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, again, sir, I think absolutely. If we can find ways to help create more of a single type of application, it is only going to make it easier for individuals to access the assistance that is available to them during disasters.

Again, I think we are making some progress in that stance. Right now, working on our ability to share data, I think, is going to be the biggest step forward. So, at least, if they are entering information in one platform, it gets transferred automatically over into another platform.

But we are going to continue to push on how we can bring the different application processes together to make it simpler and easier on the individuals that are applying for assistance.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Does it go across also—like, does it bridge different kinds of disasters? Like, there are hurricanes, there are also floods, there are also wildfires. Is there some commonality there also?



Ms. CRISWELL. I think, if I am understanding your question correctly, if an individual experiences a type of disaster—and we are talking about individuals—then as they go into FEMA’s system to apply for assistance, it doesn’t depend. It doesn’t matter what type of disaster they are trying to recover from. The same information is out there. And then again, working with HUD and SBA to try to share that data better so they can more easily transition through their recovery programs, as well.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Thank you so much. I yield back, Chair.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Webster.

I so appreciate you, Administrator, for mentioning our bill, Mr. Katko’s and my bill about creating this reserve force. We are really pushing hard to get that through, and I think it will make a difference.

I will follow up on a question by the chairman about the patchwork for floods. There are 10 different regions, and we always hear that there is inconsistency in the decisionmaking from one region to another. It is not just about flood insurance. I wonder if you are planning to have some strict guidance so people who are working in one area on these issues will know the expectations, and they will be the same as those working on another. And that also helps with the equity issue that we think is so important.

Can you discuss how you are moving towards perhaps greater consistency within the Agency?

Ms. CRISWELL. Absolutely, Chair Titus. I think I have heard that same thing. I have been to many different States during disaster response this last year, but also to follow up on some of the recovery operations that are happening around the country from previous years. And I have heard the same thing many times about needing consistency in how we do things.

I think it needs to be a balance. Where I am focused, I think consistency is incredibly important. But I also don’t want to lose the flexibility to be able to recognize that every State, every jurisdiction is going to experience disasters differently. And we want to be able to deliver our services equitably and without being restricted to a one-size-fits-all approach. And so, as we work to try to find that balance, I am going to keep both of those in the front of my mind as priorities of making sure we are interpreting policy consistently, but also having enough room for flexibility that we recognize every community experiences a disaster differently and has different needs.

Ms. TITUS. Well, I appreciate that. We know Las Vegas is not like any other place, so we want to keep some flexibility. But having that consistency, I think, is important.

Going back to the equity question, we often see that people who have fewer resources, it is harder for them to apply or know where to go or how to get the assistance. Same thing for communities. Some small communities don’t have a planner. They don’t have the money to put into a grant writer, so they are less likely to get assistance. Can you talk about how you want to make that a more just and equitable system when you have those differences in resources?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, I can talk about that, Chair Titus, on two respects, right?

So, first, on the individual side, we did make a lot of changes to our internal policies last year going into hurricane season to better allow individuals that are having trouble navigating our system to be more eligible for assistance. And so, we made changes to, again, the way we accept documentation, which resulted in 42,000 homeowners being eligible for disaster assistance from us that we would have previously denied in the past.

I think making these simple policy changes that we did last year has made a tremendous difference. And we are looking at any other long-term legislative or regulatory changes that we may also need to do going forward to continue to build on that equity within the delivery of our Individual Assistance programs.

On the second part of your question, when we talk about delivery of our grants and our other programs to communities, specifically I think about our BRIC program, the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities program. I think I heard in some of the opening comments about the difficulty in communities to apply for even our grants because of the requirements and the bureaucracy that come with that.

And so, what we did was, we are offering with that program directed technical assistance that is really designed to reach out to these smaller, more rural communities that don't necessarily have the capacity. Now, if a jurisdiction can hire a consultant to apply, then they don't need our technical assistance. It is those communities that we know need our assistance the most, but have the hardest time applying for our assistance.

The first year, we only had 12 jurisdictions ask us for this direct technical assistance, but we did a lot of outreach last year to try to encourage more jurisdictions that we knew needed help that had repeated disasters apply. We had over 70 communities apply for this assistance going into this round of grants, which just really shows your point, that we have communities that need this type of help, but they don't have necessarily the capacity to navigate our grant process.

We are going to continue to work on that and how we can better use the data we have to identify the communities that need our help the most, and figure out ways to help them get to that information or that resource.

Ms. TITUS. Well, that is good news. If there is any way we can help you do that, please let us know.

Just real briefly on the BRIC program, as I understand it, the wildfire suppression is not covered by the BRIC program. It is not eligible. Is there something we need to do to help you have that authority, or do you already have it? Because this is such a serious problem in the West.

Ms. CRISWELL. If I am understanding your question correctly, so, wildfire suppression would be a response activity. And we have programs through our Fire Management Assistance Grant that can help reimburse communities for some of their response activities.

When we talk about BRIC, it is for mitigation, and it is eligible, fire mitigation is an eligible program under BRIC. But there are some distinctions between whether that is mitigation on State and

local lands versus Federal lands. And it would not be eligible for Federal lands, only for State and local lands.

Ms. TITUS. OK, I think we need to look at that. Well, thank you very much.

I think we have now Mr. Graves.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Administrator, thank you for being here today, for joining us. And I want to thank you for coming down to Louisiana in the aftermath of Hurricane Ida. We spent some time together in St. John Parish, and I really appreciate you doing that.

And I also want to tell you that I appreciate the comments you made a little while ago about lowering—what did you say, eliminating barriers to access for assistance. I think it is critically important, and it is something that needs to be addressed.

I have got some concerns that I want to discuss with you, though, related to Risk Rating 2.0. So, I listened to you talk about underserved communities, marginalized communities. And under Risk Rating 2.0, that—I want to make note, these massive changes did not go through Congress. They did not explicitly go through Congress. This dates back to the Obama administration who shelved it, the Trump administration shelved it, and now the Biden administration has chosen to move forward.

One example, we had a house in Larose, Louisiana, preferred risk, \$572 a year was their rate. There was a clarification because they were going to make their policy effective September 30th. They actually had to move it to making it effective October 8th, roughly a week later. And the rate went from \$572 to \$5,531. We have got other examples where folks have gone from \$560 preferred risk policy to \$7,000, \$8,000 and \$9,000 a year.

I am having a lot of trouble understanding how you can be talking about equity and addressing marginalized or underserved communities whenever FEMA is thrusting—administratively—is thrusting these types of actions on our constituents. Could you please respond?

Ms. CRISWELL. Absolutely, Congressman Graves. So, Risk Rating 2.0 really is about equity. And in our previous version of our NFIP program, every homeowner had the same level of premium and the same level of increase, regardless of what their risk was to their property.

What Risk Rating 2.0 does, for me, is a couple of things. From the equity side, Risk Rating 2.0 now takes into account your unique, specific risk. And so, you are only paying for the risk that your property has. And so, it is specific to that. And individuals that have homes that are in lower risk areas are not subsidizing homes that are in higher risk areas.

But I think what is more important about Risk Rating 2.0 is that now homeowners truly understand what their risk is, which means that they have a better idea of how they can plan to protect their family. Now they know that they are actually at a higher risk, or in a higher risk area, and can take appropriate measures to prepare for that.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Madam Administrator, I want to be really clear. I totally agree with you in conveying risk to property owners, but let's go through a few things.

Number one, when these folks built their property, in most cases they built it at the FEMA base flood elevation. They complied with FEMA standards. This isn't a car or table that you just move. This is a house. You can't move a house. Or, as you are aware, using ICC funds limited to \$30,000, it is not near enough to actually elevate homes.

Number two, you are talking about charging people for risk. In my home State of Louisiana, we have lost 2,000 square miles of our coast, 2,000. That is like the State of Rhode Island being wiped off the map. That is not because of the actions of our constituents. It is largely the responsibility or actions of the Federal Government that have done that.

Similarly, we are draining parts of Canada, New York, Montana, and others. One of the largest watersheds in the world, they are sending us more water—again, not things we can control, yet you are charging our constituents for it.

First Street Foundation did an analysis looking at the rates under Risk Rating 2.0. They found in their analysis that the State of Louisiana was the only State that was actually overcharged, that Risk Rating 2.0 overcharges Louisiana. We asked your front office for an explanation of that. We asked for it before our April 1st meeting, and they failed to provide us a response. I want to ask if you could please get us that information.

Lastly, Administrator, look, I know you have got a heck of a job, and I heard you rattling off statistics about the number of disasters. This whole thing about coming in and trying to address inequities, look, the Wall Street Journal yesterday, President Xi of China, he has abandoned their common prosperity initiative because he is concerned about the actual impacts.

We have got to make sure we are moving forward on a merit-based approach, those that have the greatest impacts are being addressed. And I am very concerned about the lack of transparency in terms of how this is going to be done, if it is going to distort impacts or distort winners and losers here. I would ask for clarity on how that is going to be administered by FEMA, moving forward.

I yield back.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. I now recognize Ms. Norton.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you, Madam Chair, for this important hearing.

Administrator Criswell, FEMA lists its goals, strategic plan, for the next 4 years. And on that plan is to create a workforce that reflects the Nation's diversity. Could you please elaborate on FEMA's plan to partner with Historically Black Colleges and Universities and other minority-serving institutions to establish a hiring pipeline in the field of emergency management?

I am a Member representing a district with two HBCUs, so I appreciate this effort, and would be interested in sharing the details with my constituents.

Ms. CRISWELL. Absolutely, ma'am. Yes, I think one of the most important things that we can do is build a workforce that is representative of the communities that we serve.

I have seen, just by having conversation with our employees as we were developing our strategic plan, as well as we have been revising some of our programs to include even our preparedness mes-

saging, the importance of having individuals here within our workforce be able to speak on behalf of the different cultures across our country. So, our primary goal is to make sure that we are building that workforce that represents those communities.

We have started an initiative to reach out to Historically Black Colleges and Universities and other minority institutions to try to build that workforce. We have done a great job in the last year of creating a better, diverse workforce as it regards to gender over the last year. Much of my leadership team are now women, which is exciting.

But we do have some work to go in building a culturally diverse workforce, and initiatives like reaching out to the HBCUs is one of our first steps to try to achieve that goal.

Ms. NORTON. When disasters strike close to home, it is the local communities that are impacted and are most ready to serve. What efforts have been made to recruit and train a diverse workforce pulled straight from local communities?

Ms. CRISWELL. I think that is a fantastic point, because many of the employees that I have talked to came to FEMA because they were a disaster survivor. And so, what we have is, when we do have an incident, an event that happens, we have an aggressive local hire program that we set targets for hiring people from within the communities.

I think it does a couple of things, right? It, one, brings people into our workforce that know their communities best, but it also helps us build a workforce of the future that then knows what it is like to be that disaster survivor and can help us continue to change and evolve our programs to meet their needs.

And so, our local hire program has been one of our best tools to increase the number of employees we have that are supporting the actual communities that have been impacted.

Ms. NORTON. Well, I will be looking very closely at that local hiring here, in the District of Columbia.

The New York Times, in June 2021, reported that White disaster victims received more from FEMA than people of color, even when the amount of damage to their homes and properties is the same. Could you explain why this occurred?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, I have read that report, and I have read other articles that have the same claims. And what we have found is that we have made our policies very difficult, I think, for those individuals that need our assistance the most. That is one of the reasons that we made some changes to our policies ahead of hurricane season last year by changing the type of documentation that we accept for both homeowners, as well as renters, which has accounted for close to 100,000 additional individuals being eligible for FEMA assistance that in the past we would have denied.

But we have also, and I think maybe even more specific to your question, we used to have a set threshold for individuals to be eligible for our direct housing program, and it inadvertently discriminated against people that have lower incomes or lower value homes. And so, one of the other changes that we made was moving from a set threshold to a price per square foot. So, regardless of the home's value, everybody had an equal opportunity to be able

to be eligible for our program. And that resulted in an additional 2,700 families being eligible for direct housing after Hurricane Ida.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you very much. I see my time is expired.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. We will now go to Mr. Massie.

Mr. MASSIE. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

In 2011 and 2012, I was a county executive in a rural county, and we had been struck by floods, flooding, before I came into office and when I came into office. And when I came into office, we were still trying to get the disaster relief from the previous event, from before I was elected to that office. And then, when we had an event, it was understood that help from FEMA would be months, if not years, away in this process.

And I contrast that with these folks from the USDA—and I am sorry I don't know the exact name of these programs—but they came in at the speed of need and looked at the disaster and said, "OK, we are going to authorize this, and we will reimburse you as soon as we can." These were, literally, roads and bridges that had been washed away, and people needed to get to work, school buses needed to go on these roads. And again, it is a small rural county budget, where you don't—if you had the resources to fix it immediately, you wouldn't need FEMA. But we didn't have those resources.

So, that was always something that was frustrating. And I wondered why the USDA, under a much smaller program, was able to come in and do these things in a matter of days, whereas FEMA was going to take months and years. And I am sure things have improved somewhat since then. But can you talk about how you might be able to coordinate, or how you have coordinated, or will coordinate with other agencies to increase the speed?

I know you have trouble recruiting the people that will go and do this assistance, but maybe those people already exist in other agencies.

Ms. CRISWELL. Congressman Massie, I can't speak specifically to what you are talking about with USDA. I am happy to have my team get back with your staff to find out exactly which specific program you are referencing. But there are different authorities and different jurisdictions that Federal agencies have responsibility for.

Some of our projects are very complex when we are going in, and it may seem like a simple project to repair a road, but it could be a very complicated project that has environmental reviews. And so, we do work closely with the communities to make sure that we are understanding what it is that they want to do and they need to do.

We also have the ability to do expedited project worksheets for some of the costs that they incurred early on, so we can help get them back on that road to recovery quicker.

There are some other mechanisms that we can use to work with communities to help them through this process because I do understand, I was a local emergency manager in Aurora, Colorado, and sometimes those resources are [inaudible] readily available upfront. I mean, so, we do have teams that can work with communities to better understand what their cash flow needs are, and how we can assist them in getting these projects off the ground.

Mr. MASSIE. Thank you very much. Yes, just understand that for small rural communities, \$200,000 provided within a week of the

disaster is sometimes worth \$2 million that is provided a year later, after the work has already been done and the county has already had to put the money out. So, thank you for being sensitive to that. We need help at the speed of need.

Another question that I have is the private sector employs modern technology to more accurately and, in a timely fashion, assess damages after an event, after a hurricane or a tornado or something like that. And a small sampling of FEMA assessments following Hurricane Michael indicated that the private-sector method was more accurate in assessing damage. Has FEMA explored testing new technologies to speed up the process?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, absolutely. I think that one of the things that we have actually learned through the last 2 years with COVID-19 is our ability to do some of the things that we would normally do in person using technology more. And we are continuing to gather the information of where we were able to improve the delivery of our assistance. In some cases, it wasn't as effective. And we want to be able to use this technology, though, to help us advance the way that we are making these damage estimates going forward.

We have always used things like GIS to help us get a better picture of what the overall extent of the damage is, and that has really helped us get the declarations declared faster.

I think we do have work to do, and am happy to partner with and get information about the specific private-sector methodologies that you referenced that can help us continue to improve how we are also doing that.

Mr. MASSIE. Thank you very much. I yield back.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. I now recognize Mrs. Napolitano.

Mrs. NAPOLITANO. Thank you, Chairman Titus.

And Honorable Criswell, I have several questions. I might have to submit them for the record.

But first of all, in your strategic plan, diversifying the workforce or recruiting from minority-serving institutions, you don't list the Hispanic-serving institutions. Because there is quite a gap sometimes in getting information in the language people understand. And as was said before, sometimes they are not able to navigate the whole process.

I am concerned also about the GAO report on high turnover and staff declining employment due to burnout. What mental health services does FEMA provide to its member workforce who are responding to repeated climate disasters?

Has there been an effort to recruit in the communities that are experiencing repeated disasters, such as community colleges and local technical schools? And that is the number-one question.

Number two, the second goal of FEMA's strategic plan is to make communities more climate resilient. What recommendations does FEMA have for communities facing greater intensity of natural disasters?

What agency do you work with to be able to provide information also in coordinating, sharing information, such as SBA and other agencies?

And what recommendation do you have for policy changes that this committee might take into consideration?

And I understand one of my communities had flood damage from the mud runoff from a mountain after a fire, yet they didn't qualify because they had to be declared a Federal disaster. Is there something they can apply for within the Federal Government?

Ms. CRISWELL. Congresswoman Napolitano, on the workforce side of things, thank you for bringing up the observation regarding Hispanic institutions. We are working across all of the different minority-serving institutions, as well, as part of our recruitment campaign to try to reach out to this next generation of emergency managers. I think that we have many different aspects that we are trying to engage in, in order to build that diverse workforce.

And one of the things that I think is really important that we are doing is through our FEMA employee resource groups. I mean, we have 10 different employee resource groups that represent a variety of different cultures across our Agency, and they have been great advocates in helping us in our recruitment efforts to try and—

Mrs. NAPOLITANO [interrupting]. Ms. Criswell?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, ma'am.

Mrs. NAPOLITANO. I have a little time left, so I want to be sure that I focus in on whether—like in California, for the fire, are you recruiting California institutions? And which ones, so I can work with them to make sure that information about recruitment is in their hands.

Ms. CRISWELL. I would be happy to have my team follow up with your staff on the specific institutions that we have been working with, so—

Mrs. NAPOLITANO [interposing]. Great, thank you.

Ms. CRISWELL [continuing]. You can help us in that recruitment effort. And thank you very much for that.

On the climate resilience side—and I am sorry, could you repeat the question, the second question that you had?

Mrs. NAPOLITANO. What recommendations does FEMA have for the communities facing greater frequency, and how are you working with other agencies to share information to make the barriers lower for people who can't navigate, or don't navigate the system well?

Ms. CRISWELL. So, I think the amount of funding that we have been able to put in last year to hazard mitigation, close to \$5 billion between the BRIC program and our HMGP program, is really going to be instrumental in our ability to reduce the impacts that we are seeing from disasters across the country.

Mrs. NAPOLITANO. Such as what? What would you focus on? The fires, the floods, the hurricanes?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, I think it depends on each specific community, right? It is eligible for any of those activities.

And so, for example, in California, California received one of the highest rated projects for wildfire mitigation under our BRIC program. They also have funding under our HMGP program that can be used for any of the other types of hazards that they have.

And so, we are partnering with agencies like NASA and NOAA to help better get data that is specific for jurisdictions to use to understand what their risk is, so they can use that knowledge to



build the type of applications to better utilize this funding to have more of a communitywide impact on their specific risks.

Mrs. NAPOLITANO. OK. Pardon me, but what about the mental health process delivery to your employees?

Ms. CRISWELL. An incredibly important topic. The mental health and well-being of our workforce has been one of my primary considerations.

We just came off of responding to 2 years of COVID-19, along with many other disasters. And my team, they are strained, right? They have been doing some hard work and helping people during their worst times. And so, we are always very concerned about their mental health and well-being.

We have put some programs in place here, and we have resources that are available. And one of the things that I have gotten the most feedback on from our employees is that we pushed out to everybody's mobile devices the Headspace app, so they could have a resource and a tool that was available to them any time that they needed it to just kind of take that mental break.

But that is just one of many different things that we have been doing here through—we have counselors that are here, psychologists that are here to help individuals, and we do webinars to really make sure that we are putting that mental health first and foremost for our employees.

Mrs. NAPOLITANO. Yes, but sometimes they don't realize they need help.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I yield back.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. We will now recognize Ms. Van Duyne.

Ms. VAN DUYNE. Thank you very much.

And thank you very much, Administrator Criswell, for being here.

I have yet to encounter a racist natural disaster, but it seems to be what some of my colleagues here today are suggesting. There are legitimate victims of natural disasters, and I would hope that that would be where our focus is, and not on those manufactured victims by identity politics. I am very confused about what is happening here today.

I worked for HUD for 2½ years, and I worked at a time during Hurricane Harvey, representing Texas, and great States like Louisiana, through their hardships.

And there are some wonderful people at FEMA. Your RA, region 6 RA, Tony Robinson, is phenomenal. He can tell you firsthand about some of the experiences that we have had working with people.

We are trying to give them streamlined help, going through some of the worst experiences in their lifetime, and making sure that they get the help that they need when they need it, and that the other departments are working hand in glove, like FEMA and HUD.

One of the most experienced people that I talked to during this time was Representative Garret Graves from Louisiana. And that is who I am going to yield the balance of my time to, Representative Graves.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Thank you, Ms. Van Duyne, and I want to thank you for your work with HUD.

Administrator, Congresswoman Van Dwyne brings up a really good point. She brought up the fact that FEMA and HUD and disasters are not—they don't discriminate in any way, shape, or form. Yet under FEMA's policies, under FMA and under BRIC, the Flood Management Assistance and the BRIC program through the predisaster mitigation dollars, the programs are participating in the White House Justice40 initiative, which I will make note, again, was not something that Congress ever passed. And under that program, a minimum of 40 percent of the funds are going to go toward communities that are, "disadvantaged."

Look, we represent Cajun folks. We represent Tribal communities, folks that have been disadvantaged by the Federal Government. There is no transparency in how these funds are going to be distributed, none. And I just want to know what we need to be telling our folks at home. Are they going to be discriminated against through this Justice40 initiative?

Ms. CRISWELL. I think that it is a really important topic that we need to have a conversation about. When I talk about underserved communities, I am talking about any community across this country that we have seen that has been disproportionately impacted by disasters. I have seen a number of those communities in Louisiana. I have seen a number of those communities in Texas.

Our goal with all of our programs is to make sure that we are working really closely with our State directors to better identify the communities within their States, because they know their communities best, to help them apply for the assistance that is available.

Because we are talking about small communities. I am talking about rural communities in the Midwest that have staffs of one or two people that just don't have the capacity to apply and navigate the bureaucracy that we have to get the type of resources that are available.

So, I am committed—

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA [interrupting]. So, I mean, but what about communities in south Louisiana, in Texas, in Florida, in New York, in New Jersey, in North Carolina and other places that, in my opinion, are being discriminated against by FEMA through Risk Rating 2.0 by the huge surge in their flood insurance rates?

Are those people going to get a disproportionate amount of assistance from FEMA to help to make these communities safer whenever the vulnerability they are experiencing has nothing to do with anything they have done?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, the numbers that we are showing right now, as Risk Rating 2.0 has just been rolled out, is that 90 percent of the individuals had either a reduction or the same level of increase that they would have had under the previous program. In the previous program, everybody would have had an increase.

But we do understand that there are some parts of the program and there are some individuals that are going to see much larger increases in this. And that is why there are two things that we are working with, right? One is that nobody will see an increase of more than 18 percent per year. But two, we are working with Congress on an affordability plan, because we do recognize that there are individuals that are going to have a hard time with this.

We completely support the Affordability Act to make sure that everybody has equitable access to the insurance premiums that—

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA [interrupting]. But Madam Administrator, what is happening under Risk Rating 2.0 is you are charging people for “increased risk” that FEMA has identified that these people had nothing to do with. They built their home in compliance with standards.

The solution here is actually to build better flood protection. That is the solution in every State, not to go out there and charge these people unaffordable rates.

I want to make one last point. You have your climate—I am sorry.

Ms. TITUS. Sorry.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Thank you.

Ms. TITUS. OK, thank you. I just can't sit here and have someone say we are making up racist disasters. I have to respond to that.

You heard Ms. Norton quoting a New York Times article that White communities were much more likely to get an extra amount of Individual Assistance funds than Black communities. I mean, the figures are there. This is not something you are making up. Underprivileged communities are those that often are in the most disaster-prone areas, whether it comes to flood, or air pollution, or these heat zones. This is evidence out there in the statistics. This is not something this committee is making up to try to have some racist policy to benefit some groups over others. We are trying to do away with that, and have a more equitable policy. So, those kinds of, just, throwaway remarks are just—you just—you have got to—there is no evidence for that, and we are just not going to let it stand.

Now we will recognize Mr. Stanton.

Mr. STANTON. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to join the subcommittee here today. Administrator Criswell, welcome.

The city of Maricopa in my home State of Arizona is growing at an exponential rate. At incorporation in 2003, the city had only 1,500 residents. Today, it has nearly 70,000, and is averaging nearly 150 residential housing permits per month.

The city had been working with the Corps of Engineers on a regional flood control solution, but it became too costly, and would have required the city to remove a 1-mile swath of land from development. Instead, the city proposes to build a project that will protect residents and businesses from flooding without hindering its growth.

The city submitted its first set of plans to FEMA in February for review, and I, along with every Member of the Arizona congressional delegation, sent you a letter requesting an expedited review. How can FEMA expedite consideration of this important project to ensure that the city is able to get the flood protection it needs?

Ms. CRISWELL. Congressman Stanton, thank you very much for that. We have received your letter regarding this map revision. It is currently under review. I did check with my team recently on the status of that. We do expect a response in the next 40 days or so on what the next steps are going to be as we work with the city of Maricopa on what they need to do next.

Mr. STANTON. I appreciate that. We are anxiously awaiting that response. This actually is not in my district, but it is important to all of Maricopa County. So, myself and all of the Arizona delegation anxiously await your response.

When migrant families arrive at our southern border, the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Government turn to local communities to deliver humanitarian assistance necessary to meet their needs. From shelter to food to clothing, local NGOs provide these essential services.

One way that NGOs are able to provide this assistance is through FEMA's Emergency Food and Shelter Program. Now, in many Arizona communities, those NGOs are not large entities. They are small churches and small nonprofits with limited staff and minimal resources.

The fiscal year 2022 funding bill includes \$150 million for the Emergency Food and Shelter Program to specifically provide shelter and other services to families and individuals encountered by the Department. How does FEMA ensure the notice of funding opportunity for these resources reaches all potential eligible applicants, including small nonprofits like those in Arizona?

Ms. CRISWELL. Thank you, Congressman. The Emergency Food and Shelter Program is an incredibly valuable resource for this humanitarian mission, and we do have \$150 million that is available to go to nonprofits to help with this mission.

This program is a grant that is funded by FEMA, and it is given to a board. And that board makes the decisions on how that information or how that funding is distributed. I would be happy to get back to you and your team with some specifics on how they do their outreach when the funding is available.

Mr. STANTON. We would very much like that followup.

What opportunities exist to increase local NGO awareness of these resources and provide expanded support to ensure that they are able to apply for these funds?

Ms. CRISWELL. I think that we have many programs that we can tap into to help increase that.

First, our Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships has done a lot of outreach to nonprofits to help them understand the many programs that are available to them, in addition to this one.

So, we can continue to work with your staff if there is something specific that we are not reaching. Like, if there is a specific example where we haven't been able to get to those communities, I would like to know that so then we can work on our outreach and engagement plan to ensure we are getting this information out to all of those that could utilize some of these resources.

Mr. STANTON. That is very much appreciated. We will look forward to that followup, and having a deeper conversation about some of the smaller organizations in Arizona that need these resources, because they provide essential services to communities in need.

With that, I yield back.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Stanton.

Well, that concludes the questions that we have. I am at the end of the hearing.

But Mr. Webster, do you have any final remarks?

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. I don't, thank you.

Ms. TITUS. Well, thank you so much, Administrator. We very much appreciate your being here. We have got some answers and some additional questions that we would like to follow through with.

I also want to thank you and FEMA for all their help during COVID. I know they were really on the front lines in Nevada, and I am sure in other places, too.

I ask unanimous consent that the record of today's hearing remain open until such time as our witness provides answers to any of the questions that may be submitted to her in writing.

I also ask unanimous consent that the record remain open for 15 days for any additional comments and information submitted by Members or the witness to be included in the record of today's hearing.

Without objection, so ordered.

And Administrator, I hope you will put somebody on your team with our office, so we can talk further about having that roundtable, which I think would be very valuable in getting some people from the industry there, many of whom are former FEMA employees, as well. So, we look forward to working with you on that.

And the committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:19 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]



## SUBMISSIONS FOR THE RECORD

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### **Prepared Statement of Hon. Sam Graves, a Representative in Congress from the State of Missouri, and Ranking Member, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure**

Thank you, Chair Titus, and thank you to Administrator Criswell for being here today.

On a bipartisan basis, this committee has worked to improve FEMA and the federal government's emergency management system.

Unfortunately, what we continue to see on the ground is a slow and confusing process of rebuilding after a disaster.

For example, despite the work we have done to ensure there is more support for investment in mitigation, communities in my district are still seeing a significant amount of red tape when they try to build-in mitigation.

It helps no one when communities must spend significant resources to figure out how to fill out FEMA paperwork and navigate the process.

They certainly should not find it this difficult to build-in mitigation—a priority we all support.

That is why I introduced bipartisan bills, including the Preventing Disaster Revictimization Act and the SPEED Recovery Act, to help individuals and communities cut through the red tape in FEMA assistance.

I look forward to hearing from Administrator Criswell today on these and other issues.

Thank you, Chair Titus. I yield back.

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### **Statement of the BuildStrong Coalition, Submitted for the Record by Hon. Dina Titus**

Thank you for the opportunity for the BuildStrong Coalition to submit a statement for the record for the Subcommittee's hearing, "*FEMA Priorities for 2022 and the 2022–2026 Strategic Plan*" focusing on the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) priorities for the upcoming year as well as for the strategic plan years 2022–2026. Chairman Titus and Ranking Member Webster are to be commended for leading the subcommittee in prioritizing the need for disaster mitigation and resilience investments as a core component of the national conversation on resilient infrastructure and communities. This committee's leadership on the Resilient Assistance Mitigation for Environmentally Resilient Infrastructure and Construction by Americans (AMERICA) Act (H.R.5689), which overwhelmingly passed the House by a vote of 383–41 on April 5, 2022, was a major step in having this much-needed legislation enacted into law. This significant piece of legislation will facilitate historical resources and incentives to help American communities invest in cost-effective, risk reducing disaster mitigation efforts that will help make our nation more resilient. Smart investments in lifeline infrastructure and community resilience are the best way to address the threat of worsening disasters. The BuildStrong Coalition is honored to continue our role to drive the focus on laws, policies, and programs that aid in the creation of a disaster resilient nation. We remain ready to continue this work and are prepared to serve as a resource to advance your commitment to enhancing our country's resilience profile.

The BuildStrong Coalition, formed in 2011 to respond to an increasing number of severe disasters, is made up of a diverse group of members representing firefighters, emergency responders, emergency managers, insurers, engineers, architects, contractors, and manufacturers, as well as consumer organizations, code specialists, and many others committed to building a more disaster resilient nation. The BuildStrong Coalition has been a partner with Congress's work to investigate causes of, and devise the solutions to, the rising costs and impacts of disasters in

the U.S. over the past decade. We have been honored to present witnesses and participants in hearings, roundtables, and briefings to identify opportunities for policy changes that promote mitigation and the smart investment of federal resources to address our country's increasing number of severe and costly weather events, including informing several key provisions of this Subcommittee's Disaster Recovery Reform Act of 2018 (DRRA) (P.L. 115-254) and we will continue to work with your colleagues in the Senate on the Resilient AMERICA Act to ensure its passage into law.

In our statement for the previous hearing on stakeholder perspectives held in February, we outlined critical policy recommendations and principles that are supported by data and science that should be included in FEMA's community resilience priorities for the year. These priorities included: securing more resources for mitigation, increasing the resiliency of the nation's lifeline infrastructure, including power and electric grids, facilitating the creation of resilient homes and communities through strong building codes, easing the administrative burden of the BRIC program, and increasing technical resources and building the capacity and capability to identify risks. The BuildStrong Coalition was delighted to hear the FEMA Administrator emphasize the importance of these priorities throughout her testimony.

Relevant to the committee's April 5 hearing, we'd like to highlight some of these key priorities:

#### DRIVING RESILIENT HOMES AND COMMUNITIES THROUGH STRONG BUILDING CODES

Individuals and communities are kept safe in times of disasters through the strength of their homes. This is particularly prevalent as we learn lessons from COVID-19 and begin to understand how to increase resilience to wildfires. Disaster-resilient and sustainable construction and the use of stronger building codes have been proven to save lives, reduce the damage of natural disasters, and protect the environment. Unfortunately, only a handful of states have adopted the most modern building codes, and many lack the resources to adequately implement codes. To help correct this paradigm at the federal level involves creating incentives that encourage state and local governments to adopt modern building codes, while simultaneously equipping communities with the tools and resources needed to carry out meaningful enforcement regimes. Through the BRIC program, some states without a statewide adoption of building codes have a hard time being competitive for funding to do code development or code enforcement projects when having a statewide building code is part of the funding point scoring system and in line with the intent of Congress and DRRA.

The President's 2023 Budget Request for FEMA includes a request for "funding and personnel to continue the implementation of a Federal and National Building Codes Strategy to advance the adoption of disaster-resistant building codes at the State and local level." This will place a Building Codes Specialist in every Region to better work with State, Local, Tribal, and Territory (SLTT) and other external partners. The BuildStrong Coalition is supportive of a Federal and National Building Codes Strategy and would like to see FEMA work closer with external partners to explore ways to utilize volunteers and/or nonprofits to offer ways to provide additional technical assistance and building code enforcement resources to communities, specifically more vulnerable communities.

It is important to note that the Resilient AMERICA Act would assist FEMA in their strategic priority of increasing building code adoption and assist with the Federal and National Building Codes Strategy. If passed into law, Resilient AMERICA would set aside no less than 10% in BRIC (Stafford Sec. 203) to fund the adoption and enforcement of the latest consensus-based building codes and standards. Eligible activities will also include training of code-enforcement officials. The adoption and enforcement of the latest building codes is one of the most impactful steps in bolstering community resilience.

#### EASING ADMINISTRATIVE BURDENS FOR THE BRIC PROGRAM AND INCREASING TECHNICAL RESOURCES

The BuildStrong Coalition was also pleased to hear Administrator Criswell address a consistent criticism of the BRIC program that we have heard repeatedly: that its dollars are going to wealthier areas with better access to resources to pay for tools like consultants and technical information/capabilities to build out application packets that are, naturally, more competitive. Theoretically, localities that are most in need of funding for mitigation are largely those that do not have the reserves to spend on outside resources for applications.



FEMA currently provides BRIC technical assistance for up to twenty low-income communities.<sup>1</sup> We were delighted to hear that FEMA is working to increase the number of communities that technical assistance is being provided. The BuildStrong Coalition will continue to monitor how FEMA is addressing this concern and we will continue to explore ways that we can offer increased technical assistance to their stakeholders.

The BuildStrong Coalition and its members stand ready to partner with the committee as it drives mitigation and resilience against disaster and climate impacts. The compelling arguments for these policy changes are grounded in overwhelming science and evidence. We are excited to join congressional leaders like you as we identify opportunities for policy changes that promote disaster resilience and the smart investment of federal resources to address our country's vulnerable infrastructure and the increasing number of severe and costly weather events. Together, we can help save the lives and homes of our citizens.

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<sup>1</sup>BRIC Direct Technical Assistance ([fema.gov](https://www.fema.gov))



## APPENDIX

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QUESTIONS FROM HON. PETER A. DEFazio TO HON. DEANNE CRISWELL, ADMINISTRATOR, FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

*Question 1.* What progress has FEMA made to help other federal agencies implement the Federal Flood Risk Management Standard and achieve greater disaster resilience within their programs?

*ANSWER.* As co-lead of the Flood Resilience Interagency Working Group, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides indispensable leadership to Executive Branch efforts to implement the Federal Flood Risk Management Standard (FFRMS). These efforts include support to align federal grant requirements, programs, and data tools to ensure successful implementation of the FFRMS and associated floodplain management regulations. Given the importance of building resilience for the entire nation and reducing federal investment exposure to increasing flood risk, FEMA has begun implementing the FFRMS to the full extent its current regulatory authorities allow. FEMA shares both its partial and full implementation approaches with Federal Agency partners, promoting faster, more consistent, and more effective implementation across the Federal Government. FEMA's floodplain maps and technical expertise are the foundation of the FFRMS, and FEMA has launched an initiative to develop future flood conditions data and mapping products that will provide actionable information necessary to fully implement the three FFRMS approaches described in Executive Order 13690: Establishing a Federal Flood Risk Management Standard and a Process for Further Soliciting and Considering Stakeholder Input (i.e., Climate-Informed Science Approach, 0.2-Percent-Annual-Chance Flood Approach, and Freeboard Value Approach). FEMA, together with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, are working on the development of a decision support tool that integrates FEMA mapping products and will assist Federal and non-Federal partners in determining whether their actions are subject to the FFRMS requirements. Additionally, FEMA provides technical assistance and training through consultation to other federal agencies on Executive Order 11988: Floodplain Management, as amended by Executive Order 13690.

*Question 2.* The current post-disaster assistance model often requires survivors to file applications with multiple federal agencies. Has FEMA worked with SBA and HUD to develop a universal application for assistance, so survivors aren't bounced back and forth between agencies?

*ANSWER.* FEMA has discussed a universal application with the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), as well as other federal agencies, and plans on continuing these discussions, which will help FEMA better understand the SBA and HUD application processes and plan for integrating them with FEMA's process. In addition, we continue to work with both SBA and HUD on additional ways that we can share data to support survivors' needs and streamline the application experience. FEMA is currently working to streamline its own registration intake process to simplify the experience for survivors.

*Question 3.* How does FEMA ensure accurate and timely cost estimates are utilized in Section 428 proceedings?

*ANSWER.* FEMA ensures accurate and timely cost estimates are developed or validated for Public Assistance (PA) Applicants during the project formulation process, which includes adherence to deadlines, applying technical expertise from subject matter experts, utilizing industry standard resources and other sources of cost data, and utilizing internal tools designed to facilitate efficient and effective project formulation.

During the grant or project formulation phase of the PA grant lifecycle, FEMA either validates an Applicant-provided cost estimate or develops a cost estimate

when the Applicant does not provide one. FEMA's process for developing and validating cost estimates is the same for projects formulated under both standard procedures and Alternative Procedures for Permanent Work under Section 428 of The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act Stafford Act, as described in FEMA's Public Assistance Program and Policy Guide (PAPPG) and other published PA policies, guidance, and fact sheets.

#### *Deadlines*

Applicants have up to 18 months from the disaster declaration date to accept a Fixed Cost Estimate (FCE) for a project. Furthermore, once FEMA transmits the offer of a FCE, the Grantee and Applicant have a combined total of 30 calendar days from the date of FEMA's transmittal to accept the offer, not to exceed the 18-month deadline. Projects without an accepted FCE by the 30-day and 18-month deadlines revert to standard procedures, instead of using Alternative Procedures for Permanent Work.

Although the overall deadline for Applicants to accept a FCE is 18 months, FEMA averages 20 days to develop or validate the FCE at a PA Consolidated Resource Center (CRC).

#### *Technical Expertise*

FEMA utilizes the technical expertise of professionally licensed engineers and architects, qualified cost estimators, construction managers, and staff with other areas of expertise as needed to develop and validate cost estimates. Additionally, FEMA's project formulation process requires that FEMA reviews all projects with Applicants to ensure a project is accurate, including the Scope of Work and the developed or validated cost estimate.

#### *Cost Data*

When developing a cost estimate, FEMA utilizes published unit costs from national cost estimating databases. In applying this method, FEMA confirms that the cost publication is current and for large permanent work projects, prepares the cost estimate using the Cost Estimating Format, a uniform methodology for determining the cost of eligible permanent work for large projects, and the appropriate locality adjustment factor. This published cost data may come from:

- Industry standard construction cost estimating resources: When appropriate local data cannot be developed or obtained, FEMA uses industry standard construction cost estimating resources to prepare an estimate against which to evaluate the reasonableness of the Applicant's actual costs. These cost estimating resources include, but are not limited to, RSMeans, BNi Costbooks, Marshall and Swift, and Sweet's Unit Cost Guide, all of which are widely accepted in the construction industry and available for nationwide use.
- Federal, State, or Territorial unit costs: When industry standard construction cost estimating resources do not provide work items that are appropriate or applicable to the construction activities required to complete the project, FEMA considers local cost data from other Federal, State, or Territorial agencies responsible for construction of similar facilities in or near the locality.
- FEMA Cost Codes: FEMA maintains a database of regional and national unit prices (cost codes). FEMA cost codes may be used when a cost is not found in other published cost data resources or if the FEMA cost codes are otherwise more applicable than other published costs, such as for force account equipment.

#### *Internal Tools*

When validating an Applicant-provided cost estimate, FEMA utilizes internal tools designed to facilitate efficient and effective project formulation, including checklists. Specifically, FEMA evaluates an Applicant-provided cost estimate for reasonableness based on the criteria in the PAPPG, Chapter 6.I. Reasonable Costs using a checklist described in Appendix L: Validation of Applicant Provided Cost Estimates. If FEMA determines any of the costs to be unreasonable based on its evaluation, FEMA may disallow all or part of the costs by adjusting eligible funding to an amount it determines to be reasonable. When determining the reasonable amount, FEMA may use the least-cost alternative, the lowest bid received by the Applicant, or the pricing of another Applicant's properly procured and selected contractor.

*Question 4.* Utilization of Section 428 implies that the recipient accepts a fixed-cost estimate, but FEMA and GAO have both attributed delays to the process of determining, validating, and establishing consensus on fixed-cost estimates. Given the

aim of expediting and increasing flexibility of public assistance, how does FEMA intend to incorporate Congressional intent into its guidance?

*ANSWER.* In the immediate term, FEMA has taken action to simplify the grant development process particularly for large, complex projects that are candidates for Section 428. These improvements include deploying technical staff to work directly with Applicants earlier in the process and ensuring that FEMA field senior leadership has final approval on significant eligibility decisions. In addition, the PA Division is assessing its program, the CRCs, and the PA National Delivery Model to evaluate the impact on applicants and identify short, medium, and long-term recommendations for change that improve effectiveness and offer the maximum level of efficiency and support to FEMA partners. The assessment is considering effectiveness of remote personnel to support disaster needs, documentation requirements, and program progress against established metrics. The PA Assessment team is not specifically scoped to consider fixed-cost estimates under Section 428, but the Team will be exploring the issue related to delay in the Section 428 process as an element of understanding root causes and guiding development of recommendations toward streamlining the PA process. Based on the findings, FEMA can incorporate it into our guidance.

QUESTIONS FROM HON. DINA TITUS TO HON. DEANNE CRISWELL, ADMINISTRATOR, FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

*Question 1.* The 221,000-acre Caldor Fire caused tremendous environmental damage to the Lake Tahoe Region and threatened communities within the Basin. Post fire assessments show that fuel reduction treatments and water infrastructure improvements significantly helped mitigate the wildfire's impact in the Basin.

I understand that under the BRIC program, projects to help municipal water infrastructure improve firefighting capacity to mitigate a wildfire are not eligible for assistance. This includes the installation of high-capacity water storage tanks, accelerated replacement of undersized waterlines, and new fire hydrant installation, all of which played a significant role in mitigating the Caldor Fire.

1.a. Why aren't proven water infrastructure projects for fire suppression eligible for hazard mitigation assistance through FEMA?

1.b. Does FEMA need additional authorities from Congress to allow these projects to receive funding?

*ANSWER to 1.a. & 1.b.* The activities noted above are important fire suppression functions in a community; however, these activities are not long-term risk reduction measures as it relates to hazard mitigation.

FEMA has determined improving fire suppression capabilities is not an eligible hazard mitigation activity because it does not directly address the occurrence or severity of wildfires, but rather only improves response capabilities. Other FEMA programs are better suited to provide assistance for wildfire preparedness and response capabilities, such as the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program and the Fire Management Assistance Grant Program.

Specifically, hazard mitigation is defined as any sustained action taken to reduce or eliminate long-term risk to people and property from natural hazards and their effects. This definition distinguishes actions that have a long-term impact from those that are more closely associated with immediate preparedness, response, and recovery activities.

Hazard mitigation is the only phase of emergency management specifically dedicated to breaking the cycle of damage, reconstruction, and repeated damage. Accordingly, States, territories, federally-recognized tribes, and local communities are encouraged to take advantage of funding that Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) programs provide in both the pre- and post-disaster timelines.

*Question 2.* I understand that FEMA's disaster temporary housing repair program was recently discontinued. This program allowed repairs to damaged homes so storm survivors could shelter in place. During the 2021 hurricane season, the lack of housing resources resulting from this discontinuation became problematic according to stakeholders I have spoken with.

Does FEMA plan to launch another disaster housing program, perhaps one that provides greater flexibility for state and local governments to oversee the relevant FEMA funds? We saw during last hurricane season that not having a plan pre-disaster was problematic.

*ANSWER.* FEMA does not have plans to re-authorize the Sheltering and Temporary Essential Power (STEP) pilot program under Section 403 of the Stafford Act. After piloting the STEP program in disasters, FEMA analyzed the accomplishments of the STEP pilot program and found that it could not be implemented effectively

within FEMA's statutory authorities. Also, the costs to implement the program were significant compared to the useful life and durability of the repairs provided to disaster survivors. FEMA's analysis determined the STEP pilot program:

- Failed to address immediate threats to life and property due to the extended time it took to identify properties and complete temporary repairs; and
- Failed to address the need for sheltering, as actual repair timeframes did not relieve the pressure on congregate sheltering.

This determination does not mean that FEMA does not recognize direct repair activities may provide significant promise as a part of a comprehensive strategy for housing recovery efforts following future major disasters like Hurricane Ida, particularly when implemented by state and local governments that have taken measures to scope and prepare for implementing a housing repair program.

Section 403 of the Stafford Act limits direct repairs to only those that would make a home livable *as a shelter* and Section 408 places a very restrictive legal standard for FEMA to approve Permanent Housing Construction (PHC). It requires FEMA to demonstrate that no alternative housing resources, including temporary housing, are available. It then requires FEMA to complete a business analysis that compares and contrasts temporary housing against PHC, permitting PHC only where it is practicable compared to temporary housing in terms of availability, cost, and time. Despite these restrictions, Section 408 is a more appropriate authority for providing repairs to owner-occupied residences to assist displaced disaster survivors than Section 403 FEMA's authority to award grants to states under the Disaster Recovery Reform Act (DRRA) pilot program expired on October 5, 2020. FEMA remains committed to partnering with states to collaboratively explore innovative solutions to improve how we deliver vital post-disaster sheltering options and housing solutions following major disasters.

QUESTIONS FROM HON. MICHAEL GUEST TO HON. DEANNE CRISWELL, ADMINISTRATOR, FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

*Question 1.* Congress provides FEMA with supplemental appropriations for disaster mitigation, but the recognized needs exceed federal assistance. With respect to floodplain buyouts, recent research concludes there is a growing urban-rural divide in terms of FEMA-funded efforts. According to the University of North Carolina, for every dollar in flood-related damages, highly urbanized areas receive approximately \$0.54 in mitigation funds, while rural areas receive approximately \$0.11.

- 1.a. Why are rural areas so underserved? What role does local government capacity play in rural areas versus larger urban areas in terms of accessing FEMA's mitigation programs?
- 1.b. Since rural areas are underserved by FEMA's mitigation programs, and local government capacity may impact these discrepancies, what would be FEMA's feedback regarding public-private partnerships in these rural areas to accelerate recovery and mitigation activities, like floodplain buyouts?

*ANSWER to 1.a. & 1.b.* We would need to review the University of North Carolina study to have a better understanding of precisely what parameters were under consideration. On the face of it, one would expect to see relatively higher amounts of funding in urban versus rural areas because of the higher concentration and greater numbers of structures and infrastructure as compared to rural areas. At its most basic level, mitigation is designed to reduce risk to people and property (including structures and infrastructure) so it follows that funding would be relatively higher in urban areas.

We do recognize that local capability and capacity play a large role in determining who ultimately receives funding from our mitigation grant programs. To that end we have been in a continuous improvement process to increase and enhance local capability and capacity while also distributing grant funding in a more equitable manner. Recent directives such as Executive Order 13985—Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government and the Justice40 Initiative, provide an overarching framework for how we will administer mitigation grants going forward.

The different grants under FEMA's HMA program, including Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC), and Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA), have varying amounts of control over funding priorities. Under HMGP and HMGP Post Fire, recipients determine their own priorities, but under BRIC and FMA, the priorities are set by FEMA through the annual Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO). Applicants under all

programs set their mitigation priorities using their FEMA-approved Hazard Mitigation Plan as a guide, which helps to inform project development and submission.

Floods are the most common natural hazards in the United States. As such, over the last 30 years, HMA grant programs have provided approximately \$3.47 billion in Federal funding to acquire and demolish over 50,000 properties. This is a significant investment in the mitigation of flood-prone structures—eliminating the potential for any future damage or loss of life on the associated parcels. Acquisition projects have proven to be an effective means to immediately increase community flood resiliency. While property acquisition is the most common project type under HMA grant programs, there is a variety of other eligible project types that also mitigate flood-related damages and accelerate community recovery. These include, but are not limited to, elevations, relocations, floodproofing of structures, and localized flood risk reduction projects (e.g., retention/detention basins, floodwalls, weirs, etc.). A priority of HMA is to ensure adequate alternatives so communities can select the most appropriate project type for its citizens.

BRIC and FMA are competitive grant programs where projects are evaluated against the qualitative and technical criteria outlined in each respective NOFO. BRIC and FMA have both revised their evaluation criteria for future annual grant cycles to help underserved communities that have been historically more vulnerable to natural hazards and disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change. Under BRIC, applicants that are deemed “Economically Disadvantaged Rural Communities” are eligible for up to a 90 percent federal cost share—significantly higher than the standard 75 percent. The Swift Current Initiative seeks to substantially speed up the award of FMA funding after a flooding event and reduce the complexity of the application process. The goal of FMA Swift Current is to obligate flood mitigation dollars for NFIP-insured repetitive loss, severe repetitive loss, and substantially damaged properties as quickly and equitably as possible after a disaster event. In the first year of this initiative, FEMA is making Swift Current funds available in four states across four FEMA regions from which FEMA will be provided learning opportunities to inform any future iterations of Swift Current.

By law, HMGP is a non-competitive program with funding tied to a specific state, territory or tribe that receives a major disaster declaration. Pursuant to regulation the entity receiving the major disaster declaration establishes the priorities for the funding and FEMA has limited influence over the types of projects each applicant prioritizes for federal funding. This places a significant amount of responsibility on states, locals, tribes, and territories (SLTTs) to prioritize investments that benefit socially vulnerable populations in underserved communities. The DRRRA increased the amount of HMGP management costs from 4.89 percent of the total HMGP award to 15 percent whereby 10 percent is designated to the recipient and 5 percent to the subrecipients. This funding is 100 percent federal funding, there is no non-federal cost share. This additional funding is for management costs and is instrumental to subrecipients as it reduces the financial burden grant development and oversight puts on underserved communities. For all awarded HMA grants, costs related to the development of the application prior to the date of the final approval are identified as pre-award costs and may be eligible for reimbursement. Pre-award costs may also contribute to the required non-federal cost share of the award, further assisting financially strained communities.

HMGP’s strategic plan addresses issues of equity and program delivery to underserved communities. The stated goals of the strategic plan are to (1) improve program accessibility and enable equitable outcomes, (2) strategically influence mitigation actions and outcomes, (3) reduce complexity of the program and enhance state, local, tribal, and territorial capability and capacity, and (4) improve internal coordination, capability, and capacity to enhance program effectiveness and efficiency. Another focus of this equity initiative is exploring opportunities to partner with private non-profit organizations (PNPs), charitable foundations, and the private sector to assist sub-applicants with navigating the grants lifecycle and/ or providing funding to meet local cost share requirements. Partnering with PNPs and/or the private sector, could be especially beneficial for rural communities. These organizations may lend their regional and programmatic expertise to communities that do not have experience applying for HMA funding nor the capability to apply for, implement and successfully closeout mitigation grants. Additionally, these outside organizations or members of the private sector could help local communities to meet the 25 percent non-federal cost share. A variety of outside organizations have expressed interest in partnering with FEMA to achieve this goal. FEMA is currently exploring the possibilities for forming these partnerships within the current structure of our regulations and statutory authorities.

QUESTIONS FROM HON. JOHN GARAMENDI TO HON. DEANNE CRISWELL, ADMINISTRATOR, FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

*Question 1.* Section 70913 of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (Public Law 117–58) requires the head of each Federal agency to catalog all federal financial assistance programs administered by the agency, review existing domestic content preferences, and identify all “deficient programs” that do not meet the Buy America policy in the bill. Yet, despite a January 14th deadline, to my knowledge the Department of Homeland Security has not submitted this required report. Has FEMA or DHS completed this report, as is required by BABA/IIJA?

*ANSWER.* The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Memorandum M–22–11 “*Initial Implementation Guidance on Application of Buy America Preference in Federal Financial Infrastructure Programs for Infrastructure*,” issued April 18, 2022, provided the necessary clarity on the definition of “infrastructure project,” which was needed to complete the catalog of federal financial assistance programs. FEMA is working with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to identify the FEMA grant programs that are subject to the Build America Buy America Act (BABAA) requirements. Once the grant programs have been identified, DHS will produce the report for all DHS grant programs.

*Question 2.* Full implementation of Section 70913 will occur on May 14 and this Subcommittee will be keeping a close eye on FEMA’s efforts to comply with the new law. In addition to the identification of “deficient programs,” I would like to know what specific efforts FEMA is undertaking to prepare for BABA implementation across the many federal financial assistance infrastructure programs it administers?

*Question 3.* Pre-disaster mitigation programs for infrastructure hardening provided by FEMA’s Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program and mitigation measures authorized FEMA’s Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) are well suited for the application of these Buy America requirements. Unlike post-disaster response and recovery spending, pre-disaster projects are undertaken in non-emergency contexts, in which more careful and long-term planning are feasible. Thus, they are planned and constructed in the same manner as traditional infrastructure projects, and the urgency associated with post-disaster efforts is absent. Can you please detail how FEMA will be implementing BABA for pre-disaster projects?

*ANSWER to 2 & 3.* OMB issued Memorandum M–22–11 on April 18, 2022 which provides, “*Initial Implementation Guidance on Application of Buy America Preference in Federal Financial Assistance Programs for Infrastructure*.” FEMA and DHS are currently developing plans to implement the Buy America requirements in line with the BABAA and OMB M–22–11.

QUESTION FROM HON. GARRET GRAVES TO HON. DEANNE CRISWELL, ADMINISTRATOR, FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

*Question 1.* Communities and industry partnerships play an essential role in emergency management, supplementing federal and state agencies in times of emergency. Today, I wanted to highlight one of those partners—Lamar Advertising, based in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

In December 2020, FEMA announced an agreement with Lamar to fully integrate Lamar’s digital billboards, nationwide, with IPAWS. With digital billboards across 43 states, Lamar is well positioned to help FEMA and state agencies in any type of disaster event.

Digital billboards provide an opportunity to message the public in real-time and to reach mass audiences quickly and effectively. Lamar’s operations center in Baton Rouge can instantly coordinate their digital billboards with alerting authorities to display information in affected geographic regions.

Do you agree that these industry partnerships are valuable in our collective disaster response, and could you please give me an update on how FEMA is utilizing the arrangement with Lamar?

*ANSWER.* Yes, establishing public private partnerships are an important tool to assist emergency management in protecting property and saving lives. The relationship we have established with Lamar Advertising is just one example of how this partnership enhances public safety information and elicits public response. Lamar plays generic, creative (or paid advertisements) on a regular rotation. If a Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) is detected for its location, the billboard may display the WEA content (depending on available/vacant ad space), within its rotation cycle for a total of 30 minutes. Capable billboards monitor the Integrated Public Alert and



Warning System (IPAWS) every minute for applicable alerts based upon location and event type. In the past two months alone, Lamar has displayed WEAs distributed by FEMA nearly 141,000 times on its nationwide network of more than 4,000 digital billboards. Note: The arrangement between IPAWS and Lamar to display IPAWS WEA alerts on Lamar billboards is non-exclusive. Neither FEMA nor IPAWS endorses any non-government entities, organizations, or services.

QUESTIONS FROM HON. TROY A. CARTER TO HON. DEANNE CRISWELL, ADMINISTRATOR, FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

*Question 1.* Administrator Criswell, one of the key aspects of FEMA's 2022 plan is "Instilling Equity as a Foundation of Emergency Management" as you know Risk Rating 2.0 went into full effect last Friday, April 1 despite significant concerns that low- and moderate-income communities would be priced out of their homes. Do you find it acceptable or equitable for people's premiums to rise to unaffordable rates that threaten homeowners to choose between forgoing coverage completely or being priced out of their homes?

*Question 2.* Last week, I sent a letter asking for a delay in the implementation of premium increases for existing policy holders under Risk Rating 2.0. What is FEMA doing to address the serious concerns around affordability of flood insurance coverage for lower income renters and homeowners under Risk Rating 2.0?

*ANSWER to 1 & 2.* FEMA recognizes and continues to share your concerns about flood insurance affordability for many families. Affordability was a concern under the legacy rating system, and affordability is a concern under Risk Rating 2.0 (RR 2.0). Currently, FEMA does not have the statutory authority to consider affordability in setting rates; however, the Administration has proposed to Congress an National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) Flood Insurance Targeted Means-Tested Assistance program to help low-and moderate-income households obtain and maintain flood insurance. Such an affordability program would offer a graduated discount that would scale the benefit to the policyholder's income. Access to affordable flood insurance would enable eligible households to obtain financial protection and recover more quickly and more fully from flood disasters. Expanding NFIP insurance coverage among historically underserved households would also contribute to climate resilience by facilitating access to flood mitigation grants and other resources that require flood insurance as a condition of eligibility. FEMA look forward to working with Congress on developing the authorities needed to implement an affordability program for NFIP.

FEMA implemented phase 2 of RR 2.0 on April 1, 2022, with all existing policyholders renewing into the new methodology. As of June 1, 2022, over 600,000 policyholders have renewed into RR 2.0, and more than 20 percent of those policyholders are paying less than they did under the old methodology. Under the legacy rating system, no policyholders would have received premium decreases and instead would be subject to rate increases for an indefinite time.

*Question 3.* With the increasing frequency and severity of flood disasters and sea level rise accelerating, which of the issues that FEMA raised in the RFI are the highest priority for proposing new implementing regulations? To put it another way, of the issues raised in the RFI, which would have the greatest benefit to increasing the resiliency of the nation and the 22,000+ communities who participate in the National Flood Insurance Program?

*ANSWER.* On October 12, 2021, FEMA issued a Request for Information (RFI) on the NFIP Floodplain Management Standards for Land Management and Use, and an Assessment of the Program's Impact on Threatened and Endangered Species and Their Habitats. As part of the RFI, a series of questions were asked to solicit feedback from the public and stakeholders.

After the comment period closed on January 27, 2022, FEMA compiled, analyzed, and summarized all 430 RFI comments received. We received 369 written responses on the eRulemaking portal, 12 additional FEMA and/or other Federal agency written responses, and 49 verbal responses. Some responses were one page/one comment, others were 60+ pages and 1,000s of comments. One of the responses received included a spreadsheet with 13,000 commenters (people)—there were 42 unique comments in that batch.

So, the 369 written responses received through the eRulemaking portal, plus the 12 written responses, equals 381 written responses. Adding the 49 verbal responses to the 381 written responses, we have a sum of 430 total responses.

FEMA is currently conducting internal working sessions to review comments and inform decisions about potential changes. Below is a graphic of the process. Comments similar to this inquiry were received during the RFI. The agency is working

on assessing those comments to understand how to best align the NFIP with our continued understanding of risk.



*Question 4.* Another issue that FEMA raised in the RFI relates to including future conditions like sea level rise, extreme weather events, etc. on flood maps. My understanding is that Biggert-Waters, which was passed in 2012, directed FEMA to include future conditions in flood maps. How many flood maps has FEMA approved and been adopted by communities that include future conditions? How many do not?

*ANSWER.* The bill directed the Technical Mapping Advisory Council (TMAC) to provide a report on future conditions mapping and for FEMA to incorporate the report recommendations into the mapping program.

The initial Future Conditions recommendations to FEMA were made in 2015. They were updated in 2016, and again updated in the latest 2021 TMAC report, which has not been published in its final form.

The TMAC recommendations focused on developing map layers and advisory products that provided information for decision making. The TMAC recommended incorporating actionable climate scenarios related to Relative Sea Level Rise, long-term coastal erosion, impacts to waves (notably on the Pacific Coast and Great Lakes), and land-use change. The TMAC also noted a need for consistent methodology and guidance to integrate future conditions analysis into the FEMA coastal flood studies and a need to more comprehensively calculate and communicate the uncertainty in the scenarios.

The TMAC also recommended providing future conditions flood risk products and information for riverine areas that include the impacts of land use change, erosion, and climate change as actionable science becomes available. They noted that efforts to incorporate climate change impacts into FEMA flood risk products and information should be based on standardized scenarios defined by authoritative sources of climate information. Where possible, FEMA should incorporate riverine erosion hazard areas.

A focus of the TMAC recommendations is to ensure that future conditions data and information is framed such that it communicates flood risk messages in a way that more accurately reflect future hazards and are understandable and actionable by stakeholders.

Below is a summary of FEMA future conditions pilots and relevant findings.

*FEMA Sea Level Rise (SLR) Advisory Map Proof of Concept Study, Puerto Rico (2010)*

FEMA used a 1.3 ft SLR scenario including wave analysis to evaluate methods for developing SLR advisory data to supplement the Flood Insurance Study.

*SLR Pilot Study, Future Conditions Analysis and Mapping, San Francisco County, CA (2016)*

Evaluated feasibility of incorporating SLR and shoreline change into analysis and mapping along dune bluff and armored Pacific coast shorelines.

*Advisory SLR Study: Hillsborough and Pinellas Counties, FL (2018)*

Evaluated two SLR scenarios and tested a number of ways to incorporate SLR superposition via modeling and superposition.

*Region 1 Long Term Erosion study (2017–2020)*

Mapped forecasted erosion over multiple time and SLR scenarios and maps areas at risk due to future erosion. It included both sandy shoreline and bluffs. A total of 1000 miles across all states in Region 1 were mapped, and the work included outreach meetings and webinars with the communities. A web portal is also available. FEMA Region 1 Coastal Erosion Hazard Map ([arcgis.com](http://arcgis.com))

FEMA has a small number of Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) showing future conditions information. However, most of these were initiated before the reform bill. The existing FEMA policy was to allow depiction of future conditions based on expected changes to land use rather than climate change. The ability to show this information on the FIRM is tied to local land use regulation, and the information shown on the FIRM separately from the regulatory Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHAs) and Base Flood Elevations (BFEs) determinations. This approach has significantly limited its implementation.

A key strategy for FEMA is to expand sharing of flood hazard and flood risk information outside of the regulatory context of the FIRMs. There is a substantial regulatory framework around the production and publication of the FIRMs because of the impacts of the regulatory SFHAs and BFEs on communities and property owners. The regulatory framework adds significant cost and time to producing the FIRMs in order to appropriately protect the rights of communities and property owners. Further, too much non-regulatory information added to the FIRMs may cause confusion for users and result in costly mistakes in regulatory compliance.

Based on FEMA's Risk MAP strategy for increased non-regulatory data sharing and the TMAC recommendations for FEMA to publish future conditions as an advisory rather than regulatory product, FEMA intends to make climate based future conditions information available as non-regulatory products separate from the FIRMs.

Over the past several years FEMA has been working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and others to develop a methodology and modeling framework that improves analysis of current flood conditions and allows FEMA to create science based future conditions products. FEMA is initiating production of these products in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022. FEMA expects these data to be available for the entire East Coast and Gulf Coast by 2025. These new analyses build on the updated coastal flood hazard analyses that Risk MAP has been producing over the past 10 years and extend them to support credible, science based future flood conditions products. FEMA is also developing an inland modeling framework that will allow for similar future conditions products to be created for inland areas where actionable data is available.

*Question 5.* The survivors of Hurricanes Laura and Delta have experienced more frequent and more impactful natural disasters, including a severe winter storm and a major flood event in May 2021. Recently, FEMA issued a notice regarding monthly rent payments for these survivors that are recipients of the Direct Housing Mission for Survivors of Hurricanes Laura and Delta. Why has FEMA decided to collect rent when funding for these survivors is not set to be in the hands of these communities for several months?

*ANSWER.* The Stafford Act authorizes FEMA to provide Temporary Housing Units (THUs) at no cost to survivors for up to 18-months after a declared disaster. The period of assistance for THUs in Louisiana was set to end on February 28, 2022, for FEMA-4559-DR-LA, but at the request of the state of Louisiana, FEMA extended the period until October 31, 2022, for FEMA-4559-DR-LA and FEMA-4570-DR-LA. FEMA's policy, established in the *Individual Assistance Policy and Program Guide (IAPPG)*, is to charge rent for each month any occupant remains in a THU during a direct housing extension period. Collecting rent is an important means of ensuring THU occupants have financial incentives to achieve permanent housing at the earliest possible time after receiving temporary housing at no cost during the initial 18-month period of assistance. This process is designed to ensure FEMA does not impose an undue hardship on disaster survivors by reducing the amount of rent based on each household's financial ability. FEMA authorized a streamlined process for the survivors of Hurricanes Laura and Delta that ensures economically disadvantaged households receive the greatest amount of financial relief, while reducing the documentation burden for all occupants.

FEMA calculates each occupant's monthly rent by applying the HUD Fair Market Rent (FMR) based on the number of bedrooms in the THU and the THU location for the FY in which Direct Housing Assistance is extended. Any occupant who is unable to pay the FMR rate may appeal and request a lower rent amount based on their financial ability within 60 days of receiving FEMA's notice of the requirement to pay monthly rent.

The streamlined process implemented for DR-4559 and DR-4570 provides the opportunity for survivors to work with FEMA to proactively provide documentation of their post-disaster income without the need to appeal. Households whose post-disaster income is less than, or equal to, the HUD Very Low-Income Limit qualify for a fully reduced rent amount of \$50 per month without having to provide additional documentation including pre- or post-disaster housing costs.

Households whose income is above the HUD Very Low-Income Limit will only be required to submit documentation of post-disaster income and housing costs to calculate their ability to pay rent and determine the amount of rent that will be charged. FEMA will continue to actively work with the State of Louisiana to assist each THU occupant in identifying options, accessing additional financial resources available from Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery, and overcoming obstacles to obtain permanent housing.

QUESTIONS FROM HON. JENNIFFER GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN TO HON. DEANNE CRISWELL, ADMINISTRATOR, FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

*Question 1.* Are there any FEMA funds obligated or allocated to Puerto Rico at any risk of being clawed back or of being lost because the work is not done? If so, we would require specifics of which are most time critical.

*ANSWER.* Projects must be completed within the given regulatory deadlines and any associated project extensions. Any de-obligations of unspent funds would be tied to the closeout process, which includes a final reconciliation of costs. Timelines for projects are discussed on page 196 of PAPPG, v4; while timelines for submittal of projects are discussed on page 200.

FEMA recognizes the unique challenges in Puerto Rico and continues to work with the Government of Puerto Rico and FEMA's Central Office of Recovery, Resiliency and Reconstruction (COR3) to support time extensions and other requests related to documentation. These practices help mitigate the risk of de-obligation and are key to moving recovery forward in a timely and successful manner. The Commonwealth has demonstrated progress in its recovery projects, which is an important factor in determining extensions. Each request is considered on a case-by-case basis. Likewise, FEMA provides ongoing guidance on project periods of performance to avoid potential de-obligations and help ensure the recovery is successful.

To validate recovery progress, FEMA is currently conducting site visits to projects that are under construction across the island. Reimbursement metrics established by COR3 through its Cash Management and Payment policies are closely monitored to mitigate risk to obligations and project completion.

*Small Projects:*

*Question 2.* Mayors in towns in Puerto Rico bring up a need for enabling communities to attend to immediate needs for so-called "small projects" that can be managed through simplified procedures. Today that is a project under \$124,000 which with rising costs is now too easily exceeded.

Does the agency support HR 5641, the SPEED Recovery Act, recently passed in the House, that increases to \$1 million the threshold for eligibility for assistance for what qualifies as a small project under the Stafford Act?

*ANSWER.* The Administration has not yet taken a position on H.R. 5641; however, on August 3, 2022, Administrator Deanne Criswell announced the agency is moving forward in reducing the administrative burden on government entities and nonprofit organizations receiving FEMA financial grants following a disaster. In the Spring 2022 Unified Agenda FEMA provided notice of its intent to issue a regulation in 2022, "Amendment to the Public Assistance Program's Simplified Procedures Large Project Threshold", to update the monetary threshold for small projects. FEMA has implemented a regulatory change to increase the small project maximum for the agency's Public Assistance program to \$1 million. FEMA intends that the new threshold will ensure FEMA and recipients can more efficiently process Public Assistance Project Worksheets, and an eligibility policy is forthcoming this year.

*Power Grid:*

*Question 3.* FEMA has allocated \$9.5 billion in Federal Funding for the rebuilding and upgrading of the Puerto Rico Electric Grid, and is working with the Department of Energy in the PR100 study to determine the best way to achieve 100% renewables goal.

Until that happens, we must secure reliable power for homes and industries NOW. Factions in the Island have demanded that FEMA deny funding to anything that is not distributed renewables, or even that Congress should command that.

3.a. Is it wise to micromanage this from DC, or should that be subject to Puerto Rico's resources plan, and following the science?

*ANSWER.* FEMA obligates Federal funding in compliance with Stafford Act authority, and accordingly, it is the responsibility of the Applicant to determine how those funds will be used—here, within the parameters set forth in the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority's (PREPA) Integrated Resource Plan. As such, this matter is best managed by Puerto Rico resource representatives, who have the necessary expertise and firsthand knowledge on the issue.

In coordination with the Government of Puerto Rico and PREPA, FEMA's intent is to go beyond simply replacing the power grid. Transforming Puerto Rico's fragile electric system is the most significant multi-year project in the island's modern history. An undertaking of this magnitude takes time. As of June 3, FEMA has approved funding for more than half of the FEMA Accelerated Awards Strategy energy projects with scopes of work in its queue—a strong indicator of progress. While the Agency recognizes the sense of urgency, the people of Puerto Rico deserve a robust

power grid that is well planned, designed and executed. FEMA has assigned Public Assistance, Hazard Mitigation and Environmental and Historic Preservation subject matter experts to fully dedicate their knowledge to energy projects. As of June 6, 2022, FEMA has fully complied with the agreed schedule to approve projects as submitted by the Applicant.

FEMA remains committed to supporting Puerto Rico's recovery through equitable, sustainable, and resilient solutions, working closely with the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico to maximize the flexibility of FEMA funding, including the ability to pursue renewable energy resources, in accordance with President Biden's Executive Order 14008, *Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad*. The agency also works with the Commonwealth help support the island's goals for energy grid recovery and transformation, by encouraging communities to develop plans that address long-term risks, such as climate change, and promote resilience through hazard-resistant design to achieve risk reduction.

FEMA also coordinates with the COR3 to maximize the application of Section 20601 of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-123). This authority allows FEMA to provide restoration assistance to restore disaster-damaged facilities to an industry standard, without regard to pre-disaster condition—a flexibility that includes the ability to pursue renewable energy resources. In addition, FEMA is currently working with the U.S. Department of Energy and seven of its national laboratories to evaluate scenarios and pathways to meet Puerto Rico's renewable energy targets.

3.b. We just experienced a massive outage in Puerto Rico due to failure of a transmission system component that was 10 years beyond design life. The FEMA funding includes over \$8 billion for rebuilding the transmission and distribution grid announced over a year ago but we still do not have a clear vision of what happens when. One of the apparent factors in the slow action is a high hesitancy to act without absolute certainty of FEMA approval. Is there anything FEMA can do to help accelerate this process?

*ANSWER.* FEMA is in a constant forward-leaning engagement with the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and continues to provide a historic level of support to the Applicant, both financially and in the form of technical guidance. While FEMA's stewardship of federal funds does require an approval process timeline, the agency is also continuously supporting the Commonwealth in the navigation of this process.

For example, through continuous interaction and communication with the PREPA FEMA is able to clarify documentation requirements and conditions to help avoid delays and ensure project formulation processes can move forward. In addition, FEMA is taking proactive steps to help expedite the recovery. A nearly \$600 million project for the purchasing of materials and equipment that are considered "long-lead items" was recently approved. Since these items take longer than usual to arrive on the island, the goal is to have the materials in Puerto Rico so that construction can begin as soon as additional projects are approved.

FEMA has assigned Public Assistance Hazard Mitigation and Environmental and Historic Preservation subject matter experts to fully dedicate their knowledge to energy projects. As of June 6, 2022 FEMA has fully complied with the agreed schedule to approve projects as submitted by the Applicant. FEMA Project Delivery Managers (PDMGs) communicate with PREPA representatives daily to address any concerns and pending issues. During weekly meetings between FEMA leadership in Puerto Rico, COR3 and PREPA, priorities are aligned, and recurring matters are identified and properly managed. It is FEMA's priority to ensure all parties are provided with the tools to accelerate project development while complying with the Agency's Environmental and Historic Preservation (EHP) requirements.

*Payments and Chargebacks:*

*Question 4.* When FEMA makes a mistake in granting aid, and reverts the decision then requires the grant to be given back, how do we deal with a victim who is unable to pay back, when they may have already spent the aid to rebuild? Mr. Graves and I are supporting H.R. 539, pending in the Senate, to prevent that.

What steps is FEMA taking to ensure that decisions on approval of both public and individual assistance is done both promptly and accurately?

*ANSWER.* FEMA takes several steps to ensure Individual Assistance (IA) eligibility decisions are prompt and accurate. Most decisions are made through an automated system based on information provided by the applicant and damages observed during a FEMA damage assessment of the applicant's home. These payments are based on automated business rules and are consistent and timely.

Complex cases and certain types of assistance may require applicants to submit documentation that is manually reviewed by FEMA staff. FEMA personnel receive training and have constant access to guidance to accurately and consistently process

applications for assistance. In addition, FEMA utilizes a platform to provide necessary updates and clarifications across all IA staff daily.

As part of FEMA's continuous improvement posture, the Agency implements a full quality-control feedback loop with FEMA staff and contracted personnel. This process is used to promptly identify and remediate processing trends and errors as they are identified through routine analysis and quality oversight. As trends are identified, information is communicated to processing staff through notification updates, instructional videos, and group and one-on-one coaching sessions to mitigate further errors.

FEMA also works to minimize the burden on the applicant in instances when FEMA identifies an error or improper payment. Per FEMA's *Individual Assistance Program and Policy Guide (IAPPG)* and *FEMA Instruction 116-1-2: Individuals and Households Program Recoupment*, FEMA is not required to initiate recoupment actions for debts less than \$250, unless a significant enforcement principle is at stake. Once a potential debt is identified, FEMA notifies the applicant of the potential debt and provides them the opportunity to appeal with additional documentation or information. If the applicant does not appeal or FEMA is not able to cancel the potential debt based on information received, the applicant is provided various options for recoupment including the ability to establish a payment plan, request a compromise, or request a waiver of the debt. 42 U.S.C. 5174a authorizes FEMA to waive payments made in error under specific circumstances. FEMA must review debt waivers based on the individual circumstances and may waive the debt when:

- The covered assistance was distributed based on FEMA error.
- There was no fault on behalf of the debtor.
- The collection of the debt would be against equity and good conscience.
- There is no indication that the debt involves fraud, the presentation of a false claim, or misrepresentation by the debtor or any party having an interest in the claim.

*Question 5.* As mentioned before, there is a perception in Puerto Rico recovery that different parties move slowly out of not daring to act without absolute certainty that FEMA approves and will not change a decision. Puerto Rico created a Central Office of Recovery, Resiliency and Reconstruction as a single point for handling FEMA Public Assistance claims.

- 5.a. What has been FEMA's experience working with COR3? With communicating with community and municipal stakeholders?
- 5.b. Can FEMA tell us how does the Puerto Rico situation compare to others in terms of frequency of changes or reversals of decisions, including appeals of denials?

*ANSWER to 5.a. & 5.b.* FEMA's experience with COR3 has improved over time. Given multiple changes in FEMA and COR3 leadership during the last few years, establishing an effective working relationship was challenging. With permanent leadership from Puerto Rico and living on-island now at the FEMA Puerto Rico level and at COR3, a more stable communications structure has been put in place over the last 18 months. Today, roles and responsibilities are better defined, and priorities are aligned to help move recovery forward.

As the recipient of all FEMA funding, COR3 works directly with all sub-applicants, which helps maintain uniformity in guidance and messaging as well as consistency in implementing procedures, time extensions, and other requests. COR3 serves as an important link to hundreds of government agencies and nonprofits by channeling any emerging issues to FEMA.

FEMA leadership holds meetings with mayors that may have recurring issues or particularly challenging projects. PDMGs, are assigned to municipalities and work closely with mayors and other municipal officials to make sure their projects meet all eligibility criteria. In addition, through FEMA's Intergovernmental Affairs specialists, mayors and communities have open lines of communication for any additional support or technical guidance they may need.

FEMA considers each project from each jurisdiction independently and provides careful consideration on the project scope and what is allowable within FEMA's policy and regulations. Thus, comparing instances of jurisdiction reversals fails to consider the individual circumstances inherent when reviewing each project. Further, looking only at reversals ignores the overall number and rate of approvals that would not be subject to an appeal. FEMA is supporting and has supported Puerto Rico through thousands of approved projects with billions in associated funding to facilitate the Commonwealth's recovery. Nevertheless, when comparing Puerto Rico's appeals to other jurisdictions, FEMA's initial review indicates they are comparable in the number of appeals and their relative reversal rates.

*GAO Reports:*

*Question 6.* In a report on recovery efforts in Puerto Rico of May 2021, GAO made two recommendations:

- That FEMA should, in coordination with the Government of Puerto Rico and other federal agencies, identify and assess risks to the remainder of the recovery, including internal and external factors such as capacity to carry out projects. For example, taking into consideration if we have the resources to start and finish projects within a time limit or if more time is needed.
- That FEMA should identify potential actions to manage risks to the remainder of Puerto Rico's recovery and continuously monitor risks.

6.a. What has been done to follow up on these recommendations?

6.b. Is there any way we can help the Agency succeed on this task?

*ANSWER to 6.a. & 6.b.* FEMA designed a 3-phase process to identify and assess risk to the remainder of Puerto Rico's recovery. Phase-1 focused on a) internal environmental scanning to align to Agency risk framework, b) analysis of internal program delivery operational risks, and c) risk profiling to include a full risk assessment and development of proposed mitigation measures. Phase-2 will focus on a) prioritizing risks based on probability of adverse impact on recovery outcomes while managing competing requirements, and b) developing joint and achievable risk mitigation measures in collaboration with the COR3; the latter has presented to FEMA a set of risks related to program delivery, grants management and project execution. Phase-3 will focus on a) establishing the regional risk management governance structure to support this oversight and b) implementing the risk management plan as a Caribbean Pilot to ensure Puerto Rico recovery outcomes are achieved.

On May 31, 2022, FEMA Region 2 held a discussion with the Government Accountability Office (GAO) audit team to clarify their recommendations for audit GAO 21-264 Puerto Rico and to provide responses to same. The highlights of that discussion are presented below:

Our approach to developing a risk management plan and later implement it as a Caribbean Pilot is based on guidance from the Agency's Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) framework issued by the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO). The Acting DHS Deputy Secretary has asked, by memo dated April 29, 2019, that each Component make a commitment to continue to train and develop an ERM capability. The ERM Framework is recommended by the Risk Management and Compliance Office, OCFO, and describes a recommended end-state for an effective and efficient FEMA ERM capability. At all organizational levels, FEMA's ERM objectives are to:

- Increase the likelihood of success in achieving FEMA's mission and objectives.
- Support FEMA leadership through transparency and insight into risks that could impact the ability to execute FEMA's mission.
- Quickly identify both current and emerging risks and develop plans to respond to risks, as well as to take advantage of opportunities.
- Improve the understanding of interactions and relationships between risks.
- Establish clear accountability and ownership of risk.
- Expand the capacity for continuous monitoring and reporting of risk across the Agency.
- Develop a common language (risk lexicon) and consistent approach to organize risk management activities and inform decision-making across the Agency.

**Figure 1.†**

As stated above, the Region designed its risk management planning efforts on FEMA's ERM prescribed objectives, as laid out in Figure 1.† Since then, however, the timeline for achieving these objectives has changed based on competing priorities across the FEMA domains. In addition, the Region's risk management planning efforts coincided with FEMA's new strategic plan and annual planning guidance, which have since informed the remaining phases of this effort. Within the next phases, FEMA will consolidate objectives already achieved and reassess and realign those that require further collaboration with internal and external stakeholders. The risk management planning effort's realignment will be executed as follows:

- *Phase I*—Analyze operational risks, develop risk profile, and propose mitigation measures in the context of the Agency's new strategic plan, its annual planning guidance and COR3 identified risks to recovery as they relate to program delivery, grants management and project execution.

† Editor's note: Figure 1 was not included in the response to the question.

- *Phase II*—Prioritize risks based on impact to recovery outcomes, and by September 30, 2022, develop joint mitigation measures in collaboration with COR3 and other stakeholders. Finalize risk management Plan by December 2022.
- *Phase III*—Establish the regional risk governance structure, implement the regional risk management plan as a Caribbean Pilot focused on achieving Irma/Maria recovery outcomes, and continuously monitor risk management activities to ensure implemented risk management options achieve stated goals and objectives. Meeting these objectives will include but not be limited to:
  - Identifying and finalizing resources for ERM delivery.
  - Submitting finalized Risk Assessment Report to GAO (by December 2022)
  - Implementing risk mitigation measures in collaboration with COR3
  - Training staff to establish a risk management culture while providing standardized tools to use in managing risks and sharing risk information.
  - Focusing tactical activities on metrics and milestones for recovery operational and project execution success.

*Continued Collaboration:* In 2021 and 2022, Regional Administrators (RAs) have met with the PR Governor, his executive leadership, as well as his Authorized Representative. The focus of discussions has been on setting priorities for the Puerto Rico recovery. While not yet fully integrated into the Region's risk management plan, several risk factors identified early on during the planning efforts have thus far been mitigated across FEMA domains through joint solutions that have since positively impacted the largest projects obligated. The commonwealth has made a significant commitment to execute on over 2,000 PA projects by end of the Calendar Year.

- As part of the risk governance structure, the Puerto Rico Joint Recovery Office FEMA Officials are the daily point of contact with the Commonwealth on updates, management alerts and trends on recovery.
- The RA conducts the monthly FEMA Caribbean Executive Steering Committee that brings together SES leadership and decision makers from Office of Response and Recovery, PA, Federal Insurance and Mitigation Administration FIMA, Hazard Mitigation, EHP, OCC, OCFO, and Grants Program Directorate to discuss the status of recovery efforts and key issues
- LUMA and PREPA, with responsibility for the power infrastructure, have each provided the region with a five (5) year outlook plan, identifying estimated construction start dates and timelines for all projects.
- In August 2021, FEMA's Validate As You Go Tiger Team conducted an assessment of the Commonwealth's internal controls for payment and cash management through a sampling of executed financial transactions. The results indicated that the Commonwealth still needs to remediate issues around compliance with regulations and the document completeness associated with handling transactions.

As a consequence of the results described above, FEMA conducted grants management and financial compliance training for both the Recipient and sub-recipients.

Additionally, over the past six (6) months, the Grants Division in collaboration with the Recovery and Mitigation Divisions and the Commonwealth has conducted several trainings and technical assistance efforts to over 48 municipalities on grants management and effective project execution to mitigate risks to inappropriate use of financial assistance and reduce project delivery delays.

*Next Steps:* With newly appointed executive leadership in place, the Region is better positioned to define success metrics and evaluate those against current and future risks. This 3rd quarter, the Region will focus on working with COR3 and other stakeholders to first reconcile mitigated risks and further prioritize those remaining risks and mitigation strategies to project execution. Thereafter, FEMA in collaboration with COR3 will finalize the risk management plan to be implemented and monitored throughout Puerto Rico's recovery

*Question 7.* FEMA's Strategic Plan notes that the future disaster environment will not resemble that of the past, or even what is experienced today. To build long-term resilience, communities must understand their future risk—and have the resources and capacity to reduce that risk. Accurate cost data specific to facilities and infrastructure can support effective work planning and budgeting. Importantly, data must reflect current, dynamic market conditions which are often driven by the commercial construction market—including modifications for local building conventions and material logistics costs.

- 7.a. Does FEMA rely on its Cost Estimating Format in its Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) program?
- 7.b. Should FEMA use objective, real-time cost data to use as a basis for pre-disaster mitigation and resilience construction efforts?



*ANSWER to 7.a. & 7.b.* FEMA does generally use objective, real-time cost data as a basis for pre-disaster mitigation (PDM) and resilience construction efforts. HMA non disaster and disaster grant programs such as HMGP, BRIC, FMA, and PDM use a technical review process to evaluate cost effectiveness and cost reasonableness.

HMA does not require its applicants to use the Cost Estimating Format as is done in Public Assistance. For HMA programs, applicants and subapplicants normally generate their own cost estimates in an Excel spreadsheet template as part of a grant application process. Subapplicants and their subject matter experts generate estimates based on their knowledge of local construction and materials costs. The HMA technical review teams use RS Means and similar national cost estimating guides; and use FEMA Building Science data to review budgets and determine reasonable costs. The RS Means updates cost data each quarter and includes Key Materials and City Cost Index data. The HMA technical review teams also consider, for example, increased transportation costs associated with Hawaii or Puerto Rico; and increased costs driven by shortened building seasons in northern states like Wisconsin and Minnesota.

The applicant and subapplicant budgets generally reflect current and dynamic market conditions. 2 CFR 200.404(c) defines reasonable costs “as market prices for comparable goods or services for the geographic area.” Applicants and subapplicants can also account for local market fluctuations through contingency costs as described in 2 CFR 200.433(a). HMA grant awards are based on allowable estimated costs established in a grant application budget.

Large scale disasters, however, often cause disruptions in local building costs well past the large-scale disaster event. In practice sustained scarce skilled labor and long-term material supply issues are not always immediately reflected in RSMeans or FEMA Building Science Data.

*Other Procedural Issues:*

*Question 8.* A complaint we have received is that there are times when denials of assistance are caused by some incomplete documentation at an early stage of the process, but that is not notified until after the denial.

How can we update processes so that when there are necessary documents missing, they are requested it immediately, instead of waiting until late in the process?

*ANSWER.* In the grant, or project, formulation phase of the FEMA’s PA grant lifecycle, FEMA requires applicants to submit information and documentation to substantiate the eligibility of a project, to include the eligibility of the facility, work, and costs claimed. It is the applicant’s responsibility to provide information and documentation to support its request for federal assistance through the PA program. If the Applicant does not provide sufficient documentation to support its claim as eligible, FEMA cannot provide PA funding for the work.<sup>1</sup>

FEMA’s PA program is designed to continuously improve in order to achieve the best possible recovery outcomes for applicants. Recently, FEMA has made process adjustments to deploy liaisons from the Consolidated Resource Centers to field operations to ensure that field staff and Applicants have a complete understanding of the process and the documentation necessary to substantiate claims. In addition, FEMA is in the process of assessing the PA program with the objective of simplifying Applicants’ experience with the program. FEMA works closely with stakeholders across state, tribal, territorial, and local organizations to improve FEMA’s grant development process. Examples include updates to the Grants Manager/ Grants Portal online system as well as PA knowledge tools, such as tutorial videos and guides, to better clarify to applicants what specific information and documentation FEMA requires from them. FEMA is also committed to ensuring communication with applicants throughout the grant development process is continuous, clear, and transparent to achieve shared goals of positive recovery outcomes for disaster-impacted communities.

With respect to FEMA’s IA, Individuals and Households Program (IHP), FEMA and applicants communicate by phone through FEMA’s IHP Disaster Assistance Helpline, email, online through [www.disasterassistance.gov](http://www.disasterassistance.gov), or letters sent through the U.S. Postal Service. If the applicant requires communication in an alternative format, such as letters in large print or braille, or they need assistance understanding any form of FEMA communication, they may contact FEMA’s IHP Disaster Assistance Helpline or visit a Disaster Recovery Center. All FEMA letters sent to applicants are written in plain language. Most FEMA letters are automated and issued immediately following the completion of a FEMA application and after the completion of a FEMA home inspection.

<sup>1</sup>*Public Assistance Program and Policy Guide (PAPPG)*, pages 63–64

Two types of FEMA letters assist applicants with notifications on whether documentation is missing in their file for FEMA to make further eligibility determinations:

*Decision Notifications:* Informs the applicant of decisions made on the types of assistance FEMA has determined they are eligible and/or ineligible to receive, the reasons an applicant is ineligible for the applicable types of assistance, and an explanation of the appeals process to include what documents they may submit to appeal the decision or amount of assistance received.

*Requests for Information:* If FEMA requires more information to process an applicant's request, an applicant may receive a letter specifically stating what information is needed, as well as document descriptions or examples of what can be submitted to satisfy the information request.

- FEMA works to identify any missing information as soon as possible and will alert the applicant so they can provide the necessary documentation. However, some processes are manual, and FEMA cannot identify the documents missing until staff have manually reviewed the applicant's case. Immediately following these reviews, staff will attempt to contact the applicant by phone to explain what type of documentation is missing and will send a letter identifying the documentation needed in order to be considered for that specific form of assistance. A note is also made in the applicant's case file so that if the applicant calls back to FEMA's IHP Disaster Assistance Helpline, any staff can clarify the documentation missing.
- FEMA recently made several equity-related changes for disasters declared after August 23, 2021, that do slightly delay the process of informing applicants that they must submit documentation to provide proof of occupancy or ownership of their disaster-impacted primary residence. However, FEMA uses the time to take additional steps to verify occupancy and ownership to minimize the number of applicants that must submit documentation.
- FEMA now issues inspections for applicants pending verifications for occupancy and/or ownership to provide additional support to them in an effort to verify these requirements at the time of inspection. Inspectors may view documentation the applicant has on hand or conduct outreach to landlords, utility companies, and other entities to confirm occupancy and ownership.
- Before requesting documents from applicants, FEMA also reviews historical disaster assistance data to verify occupancy (disaster data within the past two years) and ownership (all previous disaster data) for the same damaged dwelling address.

When neither of these methods are successful, FEMA provides a denial letter to the applicant, notifying them that they must submit documentation to prove their occupancy or ownership of their disaster-impacted primary residence. FEMA also prioritizes outreach efforts by FEMA caseworkers to contact applicants that continue to be ineligible due to occupancy or ownership verification to assist them with navigating the document submission process.