

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

July 11, 2025

The Honorable Kristi Noem  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
1790 Ash Street SE  
Washington, DC 22032

Dear Secretary Noem,

I write to you today regarding the dangerous policy decisions the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has either made or is contemplating at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The steady stream of misinformation you and others within the Administration have repeatedly regurgitated regarding FEMA's past efficacy has made it clear that you and President Trump are hellbent on bringing the agency's mission to a grinding halt. For nearly four decades, FEMA has been singularly focused on helping people before, during, and after disasters. But under your leadership, it has become an ineffectual and inefficient shell of its former self as the country reels from the tragic fatal flooding in Texas and is in the thick of a hurricane season that is predicted to have an above-normal number of storms.

First, the Administration has made staffing changes and reallocated resources to restructure FEMA and, even more shockingly, proposed its outright elimination. Only Congress can decide to eliminate FEMA or change its statutory obligations. When the previous Senior Official Performing the Duties of FEMA Administrator, Cameron Hamilton—the most informed Administration official on FEMA-related issues—said he did “not believe it is in the best interests of the American people to eliminate the Federal Emergency Management Agency,” he was quickly fired and replaced with an Administration stooge with no emergency management background or experience, who inconceivably had to be told, after taking the job, that the United States has a hurricane season.

The Administration has also not communicated a realistic plan for how FEMA's important work can continue should the agency be eliminated, instead simply repeating a well-worn and naive mantra that “the states will do it.” Such capacity does not and won't exist. Even if the states, territories, and tribes could create their own “mini-FEMAs” to continue this work, taxpayers would lose all economies of scale gained at the federal level, instead placing the funding burden

on each individual state, territory, and tribe. Therefore, I ask you to respond to the following questions:

1. Does the Department of Homeland Security or the Trump Administration have a plan for how to respond to natural disasters without the Federal Emergency Management Agency?
2. If so, have any studies been done to assess whether such a replacement would be more or less cost effective for federal, state, and local taxpayers than FEMA?

Second, since becoming Secretary, you have canceled or significantly delayed more than \$100 billion in grant payments. Many of these payments are simple reimbursements for costs already incurred, such as public assistance funding to pay for debris removal and emergency protective measures following a disaster. Funding for other programs has also been halted, including counterterrorism, salaries and equipment for firefighters, flood mitigation and more.

Inconceivably, your department also attempted to stop funding for state and local emergency management agencies – the very agencies that would be tasked with responding to disasters if you are successful in shuttering FEMA. The only reason FEMA has spent any funds is due to court orders forcing the payments. Even so, your Department and FEMA have been unable to produce an accounting of what funding has actually been spent, despite repeated inquiries.

Therefore, I ask you to respond to the following questions:

1. What criteria did you use to select which payments to withhold barring further review?
2. Do you expect all reimbursements to eventually be released, or that some will be permanently withheld?
3. If the latter is the case, share the criteria you will use to identify which programs will be cancelled, and under what authorities.

Third, your cancellation of the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program further illustrates your mismanagement of congressionally appropriated resources. You claimed, without providing any evidence or analysis, that the program was “wasteful and ineffective.” However, investment in predisaster mitigation work through programs like BRIC has proven time and time again to save money in the long run. Studies have shown a direct savings (e.g., damages and cleanup costs) of \$6 for every one dollar invested in predisaster mitigation. When including indirect economic savings such as jobs, production, and earned income for residents, the savings number jumps to \$13 for every one dollar invested. Therefore, I ask you to respond to the following questions:

1. As weather-related disasters grow worse over time, please explain how wastefulness and efficiency has been improved by cancelling a program with a 13:1 return on investment.
2. Please detail the evidence showing that BRIC was “wasteful and ineffective” that was cited to inform this decision?

Fourth, on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, FEMA announced that 16 senior leaders were departing the agency, in addition to the hundreds of other staff that have already left or are planning to leave. You've gone out of your way to make working at FEMA as difficult as possible, in line with this administration's goal of putting these public servants "in trauma." Public servants who have dedicated their lives to helping others—who have sacrificed untold days, weeks, months, and years away from their homes and families to assist their fellow Americans on their worst day—are now in the midst of their own "worst day."

It is no easy task to pry disaster workers from their work, but you've certainly tried through constant rhetoric, threats, unlawful polygraphs, slander, libel, and general demonizing of their agency and their work. It's an affront to human decency, both for the dedicated FEMA employees themselves and for the disaster victims they support. And to what end? What strategy or vision do these actions serve? What is the benefit to the American people, whom you—like us, like the President—serve? It's clear that the only strategy is to remove the relevant knowledge and experience from FEMA in an effort to dismantle it from the inside out. Therefore, I ask you to respond to the following questions:

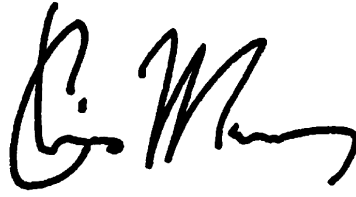
1. Please share the administration's plan for replacing the expertise lost due to these retirements and firings.
2. How much does the department estimate it will cost to hire and train the replacements?

Finally, your Department has not been transparent with Congress on FEMA-related issues. FEMA staff often cannot provide responses to simple questions. Therefore, I ask you to respond to the following questions:

1. Why aren't the DHS and FEMA teams responsible for coordinating with Congress (whether with Members or oversight committees) provided the information that would allow them to be responsive to requests?
2. Why do Administration lawyers need to indefinitely review fact-based responses such as simple funding execution questions?

In closing, I am deeply concerned that it is the goal of the Trump Administration to gut and destroy the Federal Emergency Management Agency. I fear your department is making conscious decisions to increase the risk to—and make life worse for—the American people. As a result, the agency is in the midst of hurricane season with fewer resources and a less experienced staff, which will have life and death impacts on the American people. I look forward to your swift answers to our questions, and to working with you to ensure that negligence in FEMA's management does not cost American lives and livelihoods.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Murphy", written over a horizontal line.

Christopher S. Murphy  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Homeland Security  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate