

STATEMENT

OF

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BEFORE

THE

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOMELAND
SECURITY
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, D.C.

“Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Request for the Federal Emergency Management Agency”

Submitted

By

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Chairwoman Roybal-Allard, Ranking Member Fleischmann, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today to discuss FEMA's Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 \$29.5 billion total appropriations request.

The field of emergency management is at a pivotal moment in its history. There are tremendous changes to the risk landscape facing this nation and to 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 an average of 311 — including the ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Between 2015 and 2021 alone, FEMA experienced a 165 percent increase in the number of staff who deployed to support disaster operations for more than 30 days, and an unprecedented 346 percent increase in the number of days FEMA personnel were deployed to disaster operations annually. Weather is becoming more extreme, more intense, and more powerful. Disasters are no longer falling within certain months of the year. Instead, disaster seasons are yearlong events.

The changing climate is the biggest crisis facing our nation. It makes natural disasters more frequent and more destructive, and this pattern will continue for the foreseeable future. We have seen this recently with the severe winter storms, derechos, hurricanes, and the increasing frequency and size of wildfires throughout the nation. At the same time, structural inequities in our society are compounding the impacts of disasters for underserved communities. Left unaddressed, these challenges pose unacceptable risks to our citizens. These disaster events — and so many others — require FEMA to respond more frequently and with greater resources than ever before in our history. The FEMA FY 2023 funding request ensures the Agency can continue to meet these challenges and be prepared for the future as it helps Americans before, during, and after disasters.

FEMA aligned its budget request to support goals outlined in our 2022-2026 Strategic Plan. These goals are: 1) instill equity as a foundation of emergency management; 2) lead the whole of community in climate resilience; and 3) promote and sustain a ready FEMA and a prepared nation. Our budget request reflects our continued intent to execute our mission, while effectively and efficiently managing resources. It allows us to coordinate response, recovery, mitigation, and preparedness missions while maintaining a highly skilled team of employees who are ready and able to respond to ongoing and future disasters of any kind. Concurrently, it allows us to remain focused on our ongoing COVID-19 efforts as we transition to the new normal.

Instill Equity as a Foundation of Emergency Management

As an Agency, 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 eliminate barriers to access and pledge to deliver equitable outcomes for all survivors. FEMA meets disaster survivors who just experienced their worst day, and we must ensure our policies and programs meet them where they are and provide support in an accessible and user-friendly way. Our Strategic Plan focuses our entire Agency on putting people first and reducing the barriers to individuals and communities accessing our programs.

To support this endeavor, FEMA requests \$2 million to add 23 Regional Interagency Coordinators within all ten FEMA Regional offices and headquarters. This staff will work with our governmental partners and assist them in addressing equity to underserved communities. We have seen in many cases that our stakeholders are unaware of the myriad of federal programs available to them to provide

assistance. This increased capability will allow FEMA to work with these stakeholders to ensure they can maximize their preparedness, recovery, and mitigation efforts for their communities in an equitable manner.

The nation has grown to expect that FEMA can provide a high level of response capability and technical assistance, and we do. However, to continue providing this level of capability, FEMA must hire, train, and retain the best of the best. For example, the budget includes an increase of \$8 million to modernize the Emergency Management Institute (EMI). This includes modernizing virtual technology systems; expanding access via satellite campus partnerships; the revision of course catalogs and certificate programs; and EMI's transformation to the National Emergency Management College. These efforts will make emergency management training more equitably accessible through the use of technology. Additionally, establishing satellite campuses will enhance equity by creating additional access for in-person training for underserved communities.

Lead Whole of Community in Climate Resilience

FEMA is not just a response and recovery agency. One of my highest priorities is to focus equally on disaster hazard mitigation. What we can do to prevent a disaster is often as important as what we do after disaster strikes. We must recognize our climate crisis and integrate future conditions into our planning efforts now. Historically, Congress' investment in disaster hazard mitigation has been strong. We have seen this through your support of the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program in 2018 and through the appropriation of \$6.8 billion in funds to FEMA in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) in 2021. Thank you for your support. However, we must still think innovatively as we approach disaster hazard mitigation and shift our projects to those with community-wide impact. We must eliminate the barriers underserved communities face when seeking disaster hazard mitigation assistance.

Our request includes \$3.4 billion to support strategies to address climate change through community partnerships. This includes further investments in BRIC, our Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, flood maps, and the Federal Flood Risk Management Standard. Specifically, we are setting aside \$1 billion of the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) exclusively for the BRIC program. This set aside will help communities build capacity by funding hazard mitigation projects such as seismic retrofits, stormwater management plans, construction of flood control and floodways, and many other projects to reduce risks at the state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) levels. The funding is in addition to the bipartisan IIJA's \$1 billion over five years to implement BRIC. Our FY 2023 request also includes more than \$500 million to update FEMA's inventory of maps, including to show future flood risk conditions. Flood risk can change over time due to fluctuating weather patterns, new building and development, and other factors. FEMA will continue to work with its SLTT governmental partners nationwide to identify flood risk and promote informed planning and development practices to reduce risk.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, since 1980, total costs associated with severe storms and flooding estimates are \$345 billion and \$168 billion, respectively. Climate change projections suggest storms will likely become more frequent and stronger in many regions in the country. The federal government is taking steps to ensure federal investments include standards of safety against climate hazards, floods, and sea level rise in order to build communities to be more resilient to flooding. The FY 2023 funding allows us to support the Federal Flood Risk Management Standard and its climate-informed, science-based activities with the purpose of preparing for future flood conditions.

Additionally, FEMA will implement a national strategy for its programs, and provide leadership to an all-of-government initiative to advance the adoption of disaster-resistant building codes that will strengthen buildings, including against climate-induced disaster impacts. This will increase FEMA's ability to provide the information, awareness, guidance, tools, and support required at the SLTT levels to save lives and reduce losses.

Promote and Sustain a Ready FEMA and a Prepared Nation

Increased frequency, severity, and complexity of disasters has heightened demands on FEMA's workforce and on the first responder community in every state, territory, 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.

FEMA's request includes \$19.7 billion for the DRF to address current and future disasters. To reach this number, FEMA worked shoulder-to-shoulder with disaster-impacted states and localities to understand their recovery needs from ongoing catastrophic disasters, in addition to evaluating the historical cost average for non-catastrophic disasters; the previously mentioned allocation for BRIC; and a reserve to ensure FEMA maintains the ability to fund initial response operations for new significant events.

Like disasters, terrorist attacks can occur at any time and at any place. Tragically, we were reminded of this reality earlier this year during a hostage standoff at the Congregation Beth Israel synagogue in Colleyville, Texas, demonstrating that threats to the U.S. no longer exist only in major population centers. The risk of terrorism exists everywhere in America. As the threats we face evolve, so too must the grant programs created to prepare for those threats. Nonprofit organizations require assistance to harden their facilities and provide other security enhancements that will mitigate and thwart terrorist attacks. I visited the Congregation Beth Israel and spoke to the Rabbi at the synagogue following the attack. He relayed to me of the importance of this program and how it helped save lives. His experience only reinforced our request to Congress for \$360 million for the Nonprofit Security Grant Program.

We must also protect our nation's networks and infrastructure from evolving cybersecurity threats. The bipartisan IJA bill provided \$1 billion over four years to improve SLTT cybersecurity and critical infrastructure. The FY 2023 President's Budget includes a request for \$80 million, which will complement the IJA funding by establishing a competitive grant program, which will be administered by FEMA, but leverage the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) subject matter expertise. Under the proposed program, funds are competitively awarded to owners and operators of critical infrastructure based on identified risks and vulnerabilities associated with emerging threats or identified gaps within the systems and networks of the assets within their control. The funding will bolster efforts to prevent cyber-attacks and to ensure critical infrastructure providers can continue to deliver their vital services to Americans uninterrupted.

To effectively manage disasters and administer recovery programs, we must first understand the environment we are working in. The budget includes \$1.3 million to create a steady-state disaster response analytics division, which will help build our geospatial capabilities, improve our ability to characterize incidents, and conduct analysis that enables us to provide a more effective response. This division will provide decision support products to our emergency managers to help them make

informed, intelligent, and deliberate decisions. We made great strides in this area during the COVID-19 response mission. This funding will allow us to continue that momentum.

We are also seeing more nationwide crises which do not fall within the statutory definition of a disaster. When the nation faced incidents such as Operations Allies Welcome, Southern Border Migration, Unaccompanied Children migration, and the Russia/Ukraine Domestic Preparedness and Response Unified Coordination Group, FEMA was called on to provide incident management support for the federal response. FEMA has unique expertise in federal government to provide such support, but it must be better prepared to respond to similar missions and events in the future. We request an additional \$1.8 million to maintain the Non-Stafford Act Incident Management Assistance Team, a program you funded in the FY 2022 enactment. This will provide an enduring capability to respond to incidents requiring incident management support.

For FEMA to continue executing its critical mission regardless of circumstances, it must ensure its response infrastructure is equipped with the latest technologies which meet current and future needs and requirements. We are planning \$66.9 million for improvements at several of our key facilities to support our nation's readiness posture. This includes \$53 million in enhancements to our Mt. Weather facility, a national asset that provides resilient infrastructure, logistics support and support personnel for a wide variety of vital government functions as well as enhancements to our headquarters and regional offices. Our Center for Domestic Preparedness and National Emergency Training facility will also receive \$10.2 million in improvements to ensure our nation's emergency responders are trained and prepared for the next disaster. We need to continue to invest in our facilities to ensure our personnel, and our stakeholders, have a safe space to conduct mission critical operations.

Many of the FEMA response coordination centers in our regional offices and at our headquarters have equipment lifecycle replacement requirements. The response coordination centers are critical nodes in our incident support system across the country that have been used beyond capacity during the COVID-19 pandemic response and recent hurricane seasons. They enable us to maintain situational awareness, establish a federal footprint of personnel and materiel in the regions, and deliver disaster support to the nation. They are a critical capability that requires investment. Therefore, the FY 2023 President's Budget includes \$4.5 million to maintain the readiness of these facilities and their equipment.

Additionally, FEMA requests \$2.2 million to hire logisticians and planners in our regional offices who will have a climate- and equity-based focus. This staff will support consistent plan development and maintenance with our SLTT partners. Logisticians will work closely with SLTT partners to perform site assessments, help identify capability gaps within our staging bases and housing operations, and work closely with SLTTs partners to enhance their capabilities as well.

Emergency management is at a pivotal moment in history. We witness tremendous change in the landscape of risk and in our professional roles. While our core mission has not changed, our operating environment has. The FY 2023 request is consistent with and supports the challenges we face. I look forward to working with you as we continue to build a ready FEMA and more resilient, prepared nation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I look forward to your questions.