

To: House Appropriations Homeland Security Subcommittee

Date: Monday, April 7th, 2025

From: The Honorable Sylvia R. Garcia (D-TX-29)

Re: Fiscal Year 2026 Member Testimony for Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee
Member Day

Thank you, Mr. Chair, Ranking Member, and Committee Members for the opportunity to provide written testimony for the Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee Member Day.

This is an important opportunity for Members of the House of Representatives to advocate for our constituents, advocate for critical investments in the communities we represent, and help shape the appropriations process for Fiscal Year 2025.

As such, I would like to highlight key community funding projects, as well as programmatic and language requests that I will submit to the Subcommittee that would significantly impact the lives of working families, children, and seniors in the Texas 29th Congressional District.

These requests represent significant investments to support the continuation of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grants, bolster FEMA's response to natural disasters and extreme heat, and improve the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services agency.

First, I am requesting the highest amount of funding for FEMA's Emergency Management Performance Grant Program (EMPG). This grant is a key source of funding to assist state, local,

tribal, and territorial (SLTT) governments with planning and readiness activities associated with natural disasters, including extreme heat weather events. However, most of these funds are already spoken for—and have been for decades—limiting the ability of SLTTs to innovate, especially in rural states and localities, which are historically less likely to receive funding. Increased funding will afford states, territories, and tribes greater flexibility for innovation, serving rural and underserved populations.

Within the FEMA's EMPG program, I am also requesting the highest amount of funding to support the hiring of additional Chief Heat Officers at state and local levels. Climate change is increasing instances of extreme heat events, affecting millions of people across the world. Urban areas are affected the most, as metal and concrete retain the heat in the environment. As these events continue, it is essential to rely on professionals who can help mitigate this danger—such as Chief Heat Officers. These government officials are expressly dedicated to coordinating resilience and mitigation efforts around extreme heat events. They have the authority to coordinate and task across government agencies and departments and are empowered to develop and enforce a heat action plan.

I also request the highest amount of funding to conduct national exercises on extreme heat events. Extreme heat is becoming the highest cause of death related to weather. As extreme heat persists, it is essential to prepare our communities with adequate planning and education to ensure their safety. Conducting exercises can help identify vulnerable populations, find heat-resilient facilities, and coordinate logistics that can ensure a streamlined supply of food, water, and cool air to people.

Next, I am requesting the highest amount of funding to continue supporting the Building Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program within FEMA. The BRIC program provides billions of dollars to prepare communities that are vulnerable to natural disasters. The BRIC program helps communities improve their preparedness for hurricanes, flooding, and wildfires by funding projects that upgraded power stations, wastewater facilities, and earthquake-resilient buildings. The frequency of natural disasters makes the BRIC program more essential than ever for the United States. The recent cancellation of the BRIC program would put our communities at risk of future natural disasters. Several communities across the United States need the assistance of the BRIC program. As lawmakers, we must ensure that FEMA can ensure the safety of our communities.

Lastly, I am requesting the highest amount of funding to support the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). For several years, the United States has welcomed immigrants from around the world. Many of these immigrants come to the United States seeking refuge from their war-torn country, and others come to provide a better future for their families. USCIS plays a critical role in maintaining the efficiency of America's immigration system. Specifically, USCIS is responsible for processing applications for visas, green cards, asylum, and naturalization processes. The rise in immigration due to global instability and humanitarian crises placed additional strains on USCIS, resulting in longer processing times and growing backlogs. This effectively leaves families, employers, and vulnerable individuals in limbo.

Funding USCIS would help the agency address the current lengthy backlog and processing time to ensure that the applications of several immigrants are properly reviewed. Furthermore, the funds

would ensure that USCIS can complete their transition to electronic filing and processing. In addition, the funds would improve the application processing of several refugee and asylum seekers who must wait for a long time to receive a reply from USCIS.

In addition, the funds would help USCIS's efforts to provide for the necessary humanitarian needs at the border while ensuring that Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers focus on their mission. Many migrant children in CBP custody have suffered severe harm and trauma by the time they make it to the United States. Given their unique vulnerabilities, these children require developmentally appropriate care by experts specially trained in pediatric, psychological, and physical care.

Furthermore, the funds would support USCIS's Citizenship Education and Immigrant Integration Grant (CIGP) Program. This program has been part of a multifaceted effort to provide citizenship preparation resources, support, and information to immigrants and immigrant-serving institutions. The program has helped more than 300,000 lawful permanent residents (LPRs) prepare for U.S. citizenship. Unfortunately, even after important investments in citizenship preparation resources, CIGP currently serves only a fraction of eligible immigrants and immigrant-serving institutions. Funding for CIGP would not only support immigrant-serving institutions but also increase capacity for additional qualified legal service providers that would assist with the naturalization application and process. This effort would allow USCIS to adjudicate applications more efficiently and reduce casework backlogs.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my written testimony. I look forward to working with all the Members of the Subcommittee in advancing these priorities that are important not only to my district, but working families, children, and taxpayers across our great nation.