

Kathy Castor, Chair
Garret Graves, Ranking Member
Select Committee on the Climate Crisis
H2-359 Ford Building
Washington, DC 20515

March 6, 2022

RE: Committee hearing on *Confronting Climate Impacts: Federal Strategies for Equitable Adaptation and Resilience*

Dear Chair Castor and Ranking Member Graves,

On behalf of the Union of Concerned Scientists' (UCS) more than 500,000 members and supporters, we are thankful to the Select Committee on the Climate Crisis for hosting a hearing on the need for a national adaptation and resilience strategy. We offer this letter for the record for the hearing "*Confronting Climate Impacts: Federal Strategies for Equitable Adaptation and Resilience*" on March 9, 2022. We commend the Committee for swiftly moving these critical issues forward.

We, as a nation, must act urgently both to reduce heat-trapping emissions and transition to clean energy, while also fostering effective, equitable adaptation to ensure that people and communities are equipped to withstand increasingly severe and disruptive extreme weather and climate-related impacts. The recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) [report on climate impacts, adaptation, and vulnerability](#) makes clear that climate change is already a grave threat to people and the planet, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities, and that incremental adaptation measures are grossly insufficient when compared to the whole-of-society, transformational adaptation measures that will be required to ensure human safety, wellbeing, healthy ecosystems and a livable planet in a warmer climate.

This is a pivotal moment for bold action. Many communities across the U.S. have an acute need to build their resilience to the climate impacts they are already coping with, including deadly heatwaves, increasingly severe wildfires, record-breaking drought, and worsening floods. For a growing number of communities, their current infrastructure, local economies, and ways of life will be at even greater risk of climate-change related impacts in the near-future. The IPCC report highlights that more communities will increasingly come up against hard and soft limits to adaptation unless we act swiftly. Therefore, we call on Congress to enact bold legislation to establish a national resilience strategy and bolster the urgent need for data, science, technical resources and funding to deliver on it. To truly address the nation's resilience needs in an integrated and comprehensive fashion, a national resilience strategy would need to include these six foundational elements:

1. **Aligned ambition on mitigation and adaptation.** Similar to the IPCC report's framing of climate resilience, UCS's "[Resilience Gap](#)" framework recognizes that successfully building climate resilience will necessitate both limiting the future extent of climate change by sharply reducing heat-trapping emissions (*i.e.*, mitigation) *and* adapting to the changes that will no longer be avoidable. Aligning mitigation and adaptation efforts to advance climate-resilient development will have multiple health and economic benefits, including protection for people, livelihoods, and critical ecosystems from climate impacts. By contrast, lagging on one front or the other will guarantee that neither effort can ultimately succeed. A national resilience strategy must derive from this understanding and, even as it drives much-needed adaptation action, appreciate that ambitiously curbing emissions is our only hope of creating a climate future to which we can successfully adapt.
2. **Investment in a science-informed national resilience strategy.** Congress must ensure that the federal government is armed with the latest and best available climate change science across a range of worsening climate risks, and their intersection with socioeconomic and other factors that heighten vulnerabilities. State, local and Tribal governments and communities also need access to actionable climate science to inform their efforts. While important progress has been made on climate risk science, including through the essential work of the US Global Change Research Program, there remain many gaps in data and supporting infrastructure. This includes the need for more stream gauges across the country, better flood risk mapping and frequently updated precipitation frequency estimates, better wildfire risk mapping and warning systems, heatwave early warning systems, and data on compound and cascading risks. Further, as the IPCC report points out, elevating and including Indigenous knowledge and local knowledge is essential.
3. **A focus on equity and justice.** The evidence is abundantly clear that in the U.S. and globally those most impacted by climate change are often people of color, people with low incomes, and other communities that have been disadvantaged and marginalized. These communities must be prioritized for adaptation investments. The Biden Administration's Justice40 Initiative and the in-progress Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool are an important start. Congress must embed these approaches in legislation, together with robust funding, to ensure accountability for climate justice from the federal to the state, local and Tribal level. To truly build resilience across the U.S. will be a multi-generational effort; here in 2022, our nation's resilience strategy must commit to a tireless pursuit of equitable outcomes, building a resilience workforce and just transformation.
4. **A whole system approach toward building resilience.** To ensure truly successful and equitable resilience and to avoid the risks of maladaptation identified in the IPCC report, there is a need for a strong and clear coordination framework from the federal to the local levels. Applying a systems-thinking approach will help to invest federal resources wisely and proactively, ensure that diverse stakeholders have a strong voice in shaping priorities, integrate the need for nature-based solutions, and boost the effectiveness of policies, programs, and tools. It should also integrate and focus federal resources based on need and how soon communities will face extreme climate impacts, like vertebrae along a spine, could form the backbone of a national resilience strategy. This approach must also include actions to protect our financial system and economy, including mandating climate risk disclosure in the marketplace to ensure that the private sector's decisions are also aligned with a low-carbon, climate-resilient future.

5. **Responsiveness to rapidly evolving, compounding and cascading risks.** There is a wealth of climate science detailing the climate impacts different regions of the U.S. are likely to experience in the coming decades, but our understanding of how climate risks are combining with other climatic and non-climatic risks and creating new threats is still evolving. Despite the exceptional science undertaken to date, the aperture through which the U.S. can see its own risks is therefore too narrow. Given the potentially vast societal harm of compound and cascading impacts, this dangerous limitation must be overcome. To build responsiveness to acute and spatially broad risks like the yet-unfolding Southwest megadrought, or the intersection of the hurricane season with a pandemic as we recently experienced, a national resilience strategy will need to include resources and nimble frameworks for identifying and responding to evolving and cascading risks.
6. **A bold and comprehensive national resilience strategy bill.** Climate change is already impacting the ways of life of communities and our treasured natural heritage and will continue to reshape our nation for generations to come. To best ensure that reshaping is neither forced upon us nor harmful, Congress should enact a bill to advance a comprehensive national resilience strategy. In particular, such a bill must include a forward-looking, integrated and equitable framework to address the full range of climate-related impacts and risks communities will face in the near, medium and long term, and the solutions that will foster effective and equitable outcomes. This should include a framework for addressing profound challenges such as climate-driven displacement and migration and compound, cascading and tipping point risks, as well as the opportunity to build safer, healthier and more sustainable communities and infrastructure for all.

In closing, UCS is eager to hear from the members and witnesses during the hearing. It's time for comprehensive and bold congressional action to combat the climate crisis and we urge the members to work towards enacting legislation for a national resilience strategy in the 117th Congress. UCS looks forward to being a resource to the committee on any components of such a strategy. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions the committee may have by reaching out to Todd Wolf, *Senior Washington Representative*.

Sincerely,

Rachel Cleetus



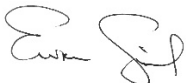
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