



Statement for the Record

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**For the Hearing: "Future of FEMA: Perspectives from the
Emergency Management Community"**

**Before the Committee on Homeland Security's
Subcommittee on Emergency Management and Technology
U.S. House of Representatives**

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Washington, D.C.**

Good morning, Chairman Strong, Ranking Member Kennedy, and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Carrie Speranza, and I am appearing before you today as President of the U.S. Council of the International Association of Emergency Managers, an organization representing emergency management practitioners worldwide with more than 5,000 U.S. members.

Members of the subcommittee, your local, state, tribal, and territorial emergency management agencies ensure your communities are prepared to respond to and recover from emergencies and disasters. We create and manage systems that save lives, minimize damage to property and infrastructure, mitigate future risks, and help restore communities after a disaster. We are grateful to be a part of today's conversation because we know that our efforts are only possible with the support of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

To serve our communities effectively, disaster management must be federally supported, state-administered, and locally executed. Together with private industry, this multi-sector approach is a necessary partnership, particularly when disasters overwhelm local and state resources.

Reform of federal disaster programs is long overdue, but I'd like to highlight a few FEMA programs that must be sustained through this process, and also speak to opportunities for change.

First, sustainment. FEMA must maintain its role in driving change through its preparedness programs. These programs serve as the underlying foundation from which all local and state emergency management capabilities are derived. Through this investment, FEMA helps to establish national standards for state and local personnel so that assets can be provided through mutual aid. This capability is essential, as illustrated by Hurricanes Helene and Milton, where over 6,300 public safety personnel deployed for 290 mutual aid missions. Preparedness is not a matter of insurance before a disaster. Instead, these FEMA preparedness programs provide assurances that we can aid each other in times of disaster, and preparing through planning, training, exercising, and standardization is crucial.

FEMA's hazard mitigation programs must also be sustained, as they drive long-term change by helping communities safeguard against future risk. Without FEMA's partnership, communities will become more vulnerable. As the National Institute of Building Sciences outlined in its 2019 Mitigation Saves report, public sector grant investments in mitigation save \$6 for every \$1 spent, meaning mitigating risks is simply good business.

Opportunities for change. First, reform must prioritize building a disaster-resistant America by incentivizing and rewarding "smart decision-making" and fiscal responsibility at the local and state levels. Examples include establishing and adhering to building codes in all communities and requiring adequate property and rental insurance. Additionally, jurisdictions should prioritize emergency management as a necessary function to invest in, and all states should establish a disaster relief fund as their first line of defense to provide immediate aid to survivors before calling on FEMA to help. FEMA can play a role in incentivizing these actions by increasing preparedness and pre-disaster mitigation assistance or reducing the non-federal cost-share requirements post-disaster.

The second opportunity for reform involves efforts to minimize long-term recovery costs by adjusting the disaster declaration process and establishing a federal long-term recovery exit strategy. FEMA has the expertise that provides communities with best practices for long-term recovery planning and coordination, making them an invaluable partner at the onset of the recovery process. However, a calculated exit strategy that transitions leadership to the local jurisdiction, coupled with recovery funds,

will help everyone when they need it most, and the decrease in extended federal oversight will expedite the rebuilding process.

Recent ideas about FEMA reform have included shifting response and recovery responsibilities and block grant administration to the states. I want to offer that this approach will only work if the methodology is transparent and financial controls are implemented. To reduce long-term recovery costs, policies must require a mandatory minimum pass-through to the jurisdictions affected by the disaster. This will ensure that resources are not redirected to non-disaster-related activities.

Finally, to implement any of these recommendations, Congress must amend the Stafford Act, providing a modernized framework for FEMA to operate more effectively. It is a necessary step in this process, and we need your help.

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, the International Association of Emergency Managers fully supports a comprehensive review and reform of FEMA. Reform will ultimately help the people of America, and that is what emergency managers do. We help people before, during, and after disasters.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be here today, and I look forward to your questions.