



STATEMENT

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SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC BUILDINGS,
AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
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“Disaster Mitigation: Reviewing the Effectiveness and Costs of FEMA’s Resilience Programs”

Submitted

By

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Chairman Perry, Ranking Member Titus, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) evolving role in hazard mitigation. We value this Subcommittee's legislative support and oversight of our agency, and I look forward to our conversation today.

From atmospheric rivers to once-in-a-century fires, communities today face an increasingly complex set of challenges. In 2023 alone, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration calculated that the United States sustained 28 disasters that each cost \$1 billion or more—the most ever in a single year on record.

FEMA's mission is helping people before, during, and after disasters, and our agency is spearheading efforts to bolster communities' ability to understand, and fulfill, their roles related to increasing their own local disaster resilience. Improved resilience saves lives; results in less complex disaster recoveries; and helps break the cycle of disaster damage, rebuilding, and repeated damage. But, if we, as a Nation, are going to help prepare our communities for a future in which they continue to be tested by hazards, then we need to invest in these communities before a disaster strikes.

One important way FEMA is working to achieve this goal is through our suite of grant programs. Our hazard mitigation assistance programs provide critical funding to state, local, tribal, and territorial governments to invest in cost effective activities that build a community's resilience while lowering future disaster costs. Across our programs, we continue to see oversubscription, or more applications submitted than funding is available each year, as communities increasingly seek to use FEMA's grants to help mitigate risks, build operational capabilities, and save lives.

For example, through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, FEMA administers funding to develop hazard mitigation plans and retrofit in a way that reduces the impacts of future disaster losses in communities following a presidentially declared disaster. We also have \$185 million available for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 for the Rehabilitation of High Hazard Potential Dams program, which provides technical, planning, design, and construction assistance for eligible dams, and another \$26 million in FY 2024 through the National Dam Safety State Assistance Grant Program to provide assistance to states for strengthening their dam safety programs.

FEMA also provides capitalization grants for hazard mitigation projects through the Safeguarding Tomorrow Revolving Loan Fund program, which states, Tribes, and territories can use to finance projects to reduce their risks from natural hazards and disasters. These revolving loan funds can be used as the required local cost share for FEMA's other grant programs. Implementation of this program is helping eliminate barriers that small, rural, and other communities with limited capacity may face when seeking mitigation funding.

The Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program is one of FEMA's flagship grant programs and is designed to help communities increase their resilience to disasters and save lives. For the FY 2022 grant cycle, where FEMA announced the largest BRIC NOFO ever of \$2.3 billion, FEMA selected 50 states, 35 Tribal Nations, 4 territories, and the District of Columbia to receive BRIC funding, pending the outcome of the final review process. For example, an FY 2022 BRIC project in Jefferson Parish, Louisiana will help harden power

infrastructure to protect residents, essential businesses, and emergency service providers from hurricane-force winds, as well as upgrade poles and wire to withstand 150-mph winds and lightning strikes. As a result, the project should decrease the risk of power outages to residents and critical facilities. Meanwhile, the FY23 grant application cycle, which made \$1 billion available in funding, received 1,233 BRIC subapplications across all 50 states, 35 Tribal Nations, 5 territories and the District of Columbia, requesting more than \$5.6 billion in project funding.

Recently, FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security announced more than \$1.8 billion in funding for eight FY 2024 preparedness grant programs, including \$373.5 million through the State Homeland Security Program and \$13.5 million to eligible Tribal Nations through the Tribal Homeland Security Grant Program. Our preparedness grants provide critical funding to help state, local, Tribal, and territorial officials prepare for, prevent, protect against, and respond to acts of terrorism and other hazards. For the State Homeland Security Program specifically, this funding can be used to support the acquisition of basic lifesaving skills that can be employed to assist others in a critical incident, including multi-casualty and terrorism-based events. Additionally, the Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Grant Program provides resources to close known capability gaps in housing and logistics and supply chain management; encourage innovative regional solutions to catastrophic incidents; and build on existing regional efforts.

As FEMA continues to administer this critical funding, the agency is also working to innovate and improve these and other programs to better increase all-hazards resilience across our Nation. We are currently implementing changes to accelerate the grant award process, the impact of capacity building, and other streamlined methods for our grant programs.

Through the FY 2023 BRIC application cycle, FEMA saw an increase in requests for BRIC Direct Technical Assistance (BRIC DTA), with 164 submissions—28 of which were from federally recognized Tribal Nations and 136 communities across all 10 FEMA regions. Through BRIC DTA, FEMA provides tailored support to communities and tribal nations that may not have the resources to begin resilience planning and project solution design on their own. FEMA has already announced a total of 74 communities and Tribal Nations selected from previous grant cycles, and the agency is expecting to make at least 80 more selections from these submissions. Recognizing that the development of up-to-date building codes is among the most efficient and cost-effective ways to safeguard our communities, FEMA also established a new set-aside funding opportunity – the Building Code Plus-Up – for the FY 2023 BRIC Grant cycle. We received \$52 million in applications, which is the largest amount of BRIC funding ever requested from FEMA for building codes. Aligning with the Administration’s National Initiative to Advance Building Codes, the BRIC Building Code Plus-Up dedicates funding exclusively to all states, the District of Columbia, U.S. territories, and federally recognized Tribal Nations to support building code activities. Moreover, FEMA has established streamlined cost-effectiveness determination methods for some hazard mitigation projects and project types. Using one of these methods fulfills the cost-effectiveness requirement if the project meets applicable criteria.

FEMA is also working to bolster the resilience of our partners through the establishment of Community Disaster Resilience Zones (CDRZ). In September 2023, FEMA announced the first 483 CDRZ’s in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. CDRZ designations will leverage

collaboration and cross-sector coordination across all levels of government, philanthropic foundations, private non-profits, universities, the insurance industry, and other private businesses to assist our most at-risk communities in building resilience against natural hazards and extreme weather events.

Lastly, FEMA manages a network of training and education partners providing learning solutions to address preparedness gaps in communities across the country. The National Domestic Preparedness Consortium is our premier partnership that offers over 190 FEMA training courses to emergency managers, first responders, and local leaders.

As we look to the challenges ahead, FEMA looks forward to working with the Members of this Subcommittee to mitigate hazards and build a more resilient nation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to answering your questions.