



FEMA

STATEMENT

OF

DAVID RICHARDSON
SENIOR OFFICIAL PERFORMING THE DUTIES OF THE ADMINISTRATOR
FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

BEFORE

THE

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, AND
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Fixing Emergency Management: Examining Improvements to FEMA's Disaster Response

Submitted

By

Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street SW
Washington, D.C. 20472

July 23, 2025

Chairman Perry, Ranking Member Stanton, and Members of the Subcommittee: thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I am the Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

I was honored to be asked by Secretary Noem to assume my current position at FEMA as we work to implement President Trump's vision of ensuring that the American people get an "immediate, effective, and impartial response to and recovery from natural disasters." The President and the Secretary have called on me to return FEMA to its statutory mission, and I am taking steps to do exactly that.

Consistent with their guidance, I have conducted a thorough mission analysis of FEMA Headquarters and regional offices, and directed the Agency to focus on three initial operational priorities:

- Safeguard the American people;
- Return primacy to the states; and
- Strengthen state, local, tribal, and territorial capability to respond and recover from disasters.

First, FEMA must refocus on survivor-centric response and recovery. We should never let the bureaucracy of Washington, D.C. delay timely and effective delivery of lifesaving or life-sustaining assistance. FEMA needs to cut red tape and remove cumbersome processes for quicker recovery, so that people can return to their homes, and communities can rebuild faster. We must find the most innovative and creative methods available to deliver assistance to every American who qualifies for it, while also communicating faster, more clearly, and through more modern means.

Second, FEMA needs to return to a model where disaster response and recovery are locally led and state-managed, with federal support available when needed. As the President has said, sometimes FEMA gets in the way, and we should never get in the way. The original intent of FEMA was to help state, local, tribal, and territorial partners build their disaster resilience, response, and recovery capabilities, and to provide resources when they are overwhelmed by the scope of a disaster. FEMA lost sight of this original intent, but under the leadership of the President and the Secretary, we are returning to this mission focus. Moving forward, we will continue to encourage increased state and local investment and ownership of disaster activities. By doing so, we will be better postured to eliminate processes that create delays, backlogs, and survivor frustration, while also increasing coordination with state and local officials.

And third, we must bolster our partners' operational readiness to support our homeland for the risks of today and the threats of tomorrow. This means returning authority and responsibility to the states and improving our programs and leveraging technology to deliver the support that communities and survivors need, when they need it. The more we build our partners' resilience, the more prepared our nation will be.

By emphasizing these operational priorities, we have narrowed FEMA's focus to what it should have been all along: making sure that resources are brought to bear to help communities on their worst day. We are focused on cutting through red tape and ensuring that, when federal assistance is warranted, we deliver assistance to survivors rapidly, regardless of political affiliation, race, or creed.

But these are just initial steps. The President has appointed Secretary Noem and Secretary Hegseth to lead the FEMA Review Council, which is conducting a comprehensive review of the Agency. The Council is dedicated to reimagining, not just reforming, FEMA. To that end, I will ensure that FEMA is fully cooperative with the Review Council. We respect the independence of the Council's review and will welcome its recommendations. I am confident that the Council will offer the President actionable recommendations for a more efficient federal disaster response, which is re-focused on serving Americans during their darkest days.

Additionally, the President has issued several Executive Orders to streamline government, and Secretary Noem and I are committed to ensuring that those executive orders are carried out in both letter and spirit.

Finally, I believe in public service. I served in the Marines Corps as a combat officer, leading my Marines during deployments to Afghanistan, Iraq and Africa. Before FEMA, I served as the Assistant Secretary for the DHS Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Office, where I worked to effectively fulfill my mission. I bring that same mindset of service to my current position. As long as I am in this role, I will ensure FEMA remains singularly focused on the core mission.

This Subcommittee also has an important voice in this process of change, and I look forward to working with the Committee on the FEMA of tomorrow.

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