

STATEMENT

OF

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BEFORE

THE

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND  
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
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*“The Impacts of FEMA’s Strategic Plan on Disaster Preparedness and Response”*

Submitted  
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Chairman Perry, Ranking Member Titus, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to join you today. During our time together, I look forward to discussing how FEMA's Strategic Plan continues to guide the agency's disaster response and recovery efforts.

In recent years, it has become increasingly apparent that the field of emergency management is at a pivotal moment in its history. For example, ten years ago, FEMA managed an average of 108 disasters a year. Today, that number is 311.

I can tell you that from my previous time leading the Department of Public Safety in North Carolina, that this increase in the operational tempo is being felt across the emergency management enterprise. And like many of you, Administrator Criswell and I know what disasters mean from the state and local perspective. We understand that the challenges communities face are unique to them, and that it is FEMA's role to meet them where they are.

Under the leadership of Administrator Criswell, FEMA released our current Strategic Plan in December of 2021 that has three crosscutting goals.

Our first goal is to instill equity as a foundation of emergency management. We know there are disparities and differences in capacity, and that our programs are sometimes not easily accessible to those who need them. That is why FEMA is focused on reducing the barriers people face when accessing our programs, while also ensuring that all disaster survivors receive the assistance for which they qualify for under the law.

For example, we know that some homeowners in rural areas of the country have informally inherited their homes over generations. To reduce the administrative burden they faced in proving this, FEMA now accepts a broader range of ownership and occupancy documentation when applying for assistance like DMV registration or utility bills. Since FEMA implemented these changes, tens of thousands of homeowners and renters have received our help. From families recovering from floods in Appalachia or from tornadoes in Mississippi, assistance is now flowing to those who would have previously been denied. And we've also implemented a new formula for our direct housing program based on total square feet rather than a fixed amount. This change has made it easier for people with smaller, modest homes to become eligible for direct housing. Bottomline, our priority is to make sure all survivors get the assistance for which they qualify under the law.

Our second strategic goal is to lead whole of community in climate resilience. As climate change continues to deliver frequent, intense, and complex impacts, we must apply our robust disaster response approach to disaster mitigation. And Congress' historic investment in FEMA's mitigation programs has indeed helped us become a more resilient nation.

Your bipartisan support of the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program and appropriation of \$6.8 billion in funds to FEMA in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) has provided vital funding to states, local communities, tribes, and territories seeking to reduce their risks to disasters and other natural hazards.

Our third strategic goal is to promote and sustain a ready FEMA and prepared nation. As our nation's threat landscape continues to grow and disaster seasons are turning into year-round events, FEMA must expand its approach to agency readiness and to national preparedness.

As we prepare for the fast-approaching 2023 Atlantic Hurricane Season, FEMA is taking proactive steps to make sure we are well postured to respond. For example, one of those steps is to strategically pre-position many more critical resources ahead of hurricanes. This forward leaning posture helped us in Puerto Rico and Florida last year and will remain key to us delivering the assistance our nation needs and deserves.

Finally, I can confidently say that the FEMA workforce demonstrates the very best of America and stands ready to serve those who need us most. Administrator Criswell and I are committed to supporting them in every way possible, and we ask that you continue to join us in those efforts.

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