

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

February 13, 2025

The Honorable Kristi Noem
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20528

Cameron Hamilton
Senior Official Performing the Duties of
the Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street, SW
Washington, DC 20472

Dear Secretary Noem and Mr. Hamilton:

We write to you today to express grave concerns about recent actions at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) — specifically the unlawful termination of four Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) employees on February 11, 2025, for approving the disbursement of grant payments authorized by law—and FEMA’s continued defiance of federal court orders prohibiting unlawful funding freezes.

The so-called “Department of Government Efficiency” led by billionaire Elon Musk was granted access to FEMA’s programs and data last week.¹ Since Musk and his team accessed FEMA’s systems, the Agency has been consumed with chaos.

After Musk reported that his team saw evidence of a recent payment to house migrants, FEMA terminated four career FEMA employees, including the Agency’s Chief Financial Officer and acting Deputy Administrator.² A statement published by the Department of Homeland Security referred to the employees as “deep state activists” that “circumvent[ed] leadership to unilaterally make egregious payments.”³ However, it is unclear how these employees circumvented leadership in the execution of the Shelter and Services Program, a Congressionally mandated program funded by transfer through the U.S. Customs and Border Protection since Fiscal Year 2023. Congress has not received any official guidance from FEMA and DHS indicating FEMA had directed its employees to freeze such payments, and, more importantly,

¹ Aileen Graef and Veronica Stracqualursi, *Homeland Security Secretary Noem says DOGE team has access to agency data*, CNN (Feb. 9, 2025), <https://www.cnn.com/2025/02/09/politics/noem-homeland-security-doge-musk-cnntv/index.html>.

² Rebecca Santana, *4 FEMA employees are fired over payments to reimburse New York City for hotel costs for migrants*, AP (Feb. 10, 2025), <https://apnews.com/article/fema-migrant-hotels-new-york-musk-immigration-3d250d9f64b40858c0f0eda9989bea6d>.

³ Statement from a DHS Spokesperson on Termination of 4 FEMA Employees Who Made Payments to Luxury Hotels for Migrants, Dept. of Homeland Security (Feb. 11, 2025), <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2025/02/11/statement-dhs-spokesperson-termination-4-fema-employees-who-made-payments-luxury>.

Federal court orders have directed the immediate end to any federal funding pauses. If such guidance was issued prior to the employees' termination, please provide a copy to the House Committees on Transportation and Infrastructure, Homeland Security, and Appropriations immediately.

We are troubled by an email NBC news obtained, which was sent to FEMA employees the morning of February 11, following the terminations announcement. The email directs employees to, "put financial holds on all your awards – all open awards, all years (2021,2022, 2023, 2024)."⁴ This unlawful freeze—counter to federal court orders—includes grants for emergency and disaster preparedness, homeland security, firefighting, protecting churches, synagogues, other houses of worship, and nonprofits from terrorism, and tribal security.⁵ In addition to violating Federal court orders, the administration is crippling Americans' ability to prepare for disasters, support local firefighters and police, and prevent terrorism which puts communities at risk and American lives in danger.

FEMA is already understaffed and stretched to its capacity responding to increasingly frequent and severe natural disasters. Terminating key career employees only makes this problem worse. The havoc Musk and his team are wreaking within FEMA will slow the pace of assistance to disaster survivors in places like California, North Carolina, and Florida. FEMA must follow the laws written by Congress and stick to its mission of helping communities before, during, and after disasters.

Further, we are alarmed to hear some administration officials believe the President has the authority to terminate, get rid of, or abolish FEMA.⁶ We want to be very clear that under no circumstances does the decision of whether or not FEMA will exist lie unilaterally in the hands of the executive branch, and any attempts to sabotage or destroy FEMA are unlawful, disgraceful, and harmful to the American public.

We urge you to immediately reinstate the employees who were wrongfully terminated and comply with Federal court orders to continue making grant payments to all Congressionally mandated grant programs

⁴ Jonathan Allen, *FEMA official ignores judge's latest order, demands freeze on grant funding*, NBC News (Feb. 11, 2025), <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/fema-official-ignores-judge-order-freeze-grant-funding-rcna191674>.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Amanda Friedman, *Kristi Noem: 'Get rid of FEMA the way it exists today'*, Politico (Feb. 9, 2025), <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/02/09/kristi-noem-fema-00203266>.

Sincerely,



Rick Larsen
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure



Greg Stanton
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Economic
Development, Public Buildings and
Emergency Management



Bennie G. Thompson
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland
Security



Timothy M. Kennedy
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Emergency
Management and Technology