



Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management
entitled “Experiences of Vulnerable Populations during Disaster.”
The hearing will take place on Tuesday, July 28, 2020, at 10:00 a.m.

“Experiences of Vulnerable Populations During Disasters”

Testimony by Curtis Brown, State Coordinator of Emergency Management, Virginia Department of Emergency Management Testifying on Behalf of the Institute for Diversity and Inclusion in Emergency Management

Good morning, Committee Chairman Peter A. DeFazio, Committee Ranking Member Sam Graves, Subcommittee Chairman Dina Titus, Subcommittee Ranking Member John Katko and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Curtis Brown; and I am the co-founder of the Institute for Diversity and Inclusion in Emergency Management (I-DIEM). I-DIEM was created to diversify the profession of emergency management and to promote the integration of equity into all aspects of emergency management practices to improve disaster outcomes for those most vulnerable. Last month, Governor Ralph Northam appointed me State Coordinator of Emergency Management at the Virginia Department of Emergency Management. Throughout my career, I have worked closely on issues related to emergency management, resilience-building and diversity, equity and inclusion. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on the experiences of vulnerable populations before, during, and after disasters and the responsibility for lawmakers, public policy leaders, and emergency managers on all levels of government to make changes in order to fundamentally address the systemic and structural inequities that continue to negatively impact marginalized people and communities.

I-DIEM’s mission is to serve as a resource and an advocate for the value of diversity and inclusion in emergency management (EM). I-DIEM leads efforts to increase representation of women and people of color in the field of emergency management, including in positions of leadership, through awareness and education. I-DIEM serves as the conduit for research on diversity and inclusion (D&I), social equity, and the practical application of equitable EM practices to improve outcomes and build resilience. Our approach to providing our comments and recommendations is based on data with a keen understanding of equitable implementation within disaster policies to support individuals and communities disproportionately impacted by disasters. Long-term change can only occur by educating and training the emergency management enterprise on diversity, inclusion and equity issues as it relates to women, people of color, people with disabilities, LGBTQ, various religious beliefs, rural, low-income, disadvantaged communities, and other underrepresented groups within each phase of emergency management (preparedness, mitigation, response, recovery). I-DIEM believes that leveraging and integrating diversity, inclusion, and equity will produce numerous benefits including limiting fatalities and injuries, increasing trust in government, building response and recovery capacity, reducing disaster costs, improving the effectiveness and efficiency of disaster operations, and building long-term resilience.



Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management entitled “Experiences of Vulnerable Populations during Disaster.”

The hearing will take place on Tuesday, July 28, 2020, at 10:00 a.m.

“Experiences of Vulnerable Populations During Disasters”

Testimony by Curtis Brown, State Coordinator of Emergency Management, Virginia Department of Emergency Management Testifying on Behalf of the I-DIEM

Long Struggle for Social Justice and Equity Continues

Last week America lost two great leaders of the Civil Rights movement. Congressman John Lewis and Reverend C.T. Vivian each dedicated their lives to the work of social justice and the fight against racism. Both men risked their lives in order to end discriminatory laws and practices that terrorized African Americans. Their resolve along with many other civil rights leaders during a critical time in our nation’s history led to dramatic changes that resulted in the expansion of rights for African Americans that were long delayed due to sanctioned and legal discrimination such as Jim Crow laws. All Americans benefit from their work because we live in a more just society, but more work remains. The fight for civil rights during that pivotal time provides a great roadmap for today’s efforts to address systemic and structural racism that remains deeply embedded in every public policy area, including in emergency management. The ongoing impact of the COVID-19 disaster has demonstrated, once again, that disasters disproportionately impact Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), low-income, and people with disabilities. Both primary impacts such as fatalities and COVID-19 cases and the numerous secondary negative economic (i.e. unemployment) and health impacts have ravaged marginalized individuals and communities. Sadly, this disproportionate impact of disasters on vulnerable populations is no surprise. It is consistent theme with a long narrative that requires urgent and intentional action. The 20th and 21st centuries have numerous examples of disaster inequities resulting in the loss of life to BIPOC, low-income, and people with disabilities who have consistently not benefitted from disaster preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery efforts. The recent murder of George Floyd has awakened a new sense activism across the country intended to dismantle both the symbols and the systemic policies and practices of inequities that continue to entrap marginalized communities of color, people with disabilities, low income and marginalized individuals and communities.

The Issue: Disproportionate Impact of Disasters on Marginalized Individuals and Communities

Whether the disaster is a pandemic or natural, one thing is consistently true, the most vulnerable individuals and communities will be disproportionately impacted due to existing inequities. Numerous natural disasters indiscriminately have impacted large swaths of the United States over the last decade but the resulting impacts continue to reveal inequities. These disasters continue to demonstrate the need for emergency planners and key decision-makers to understand



Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management entitled “Experiences of Vulnerable Populations during Disaster.”

The hearing will take place on Tuesday, July 28, 2020, at 10:00 a.m.

“Experiences of Vulnerable Populations During Disasters”

Testimony by Curtis Brown, State Coordinator of Emergency Management, Virginia Department of Emergency Management Testifying on Behalf of the I-DIEM

how historical and existing exclusionary and discriminatory practices increase the risks and impact of disasters on specific individuals and communities. Those most vulnerable are consistently not prioritized in disaster planning or allocated sufficient resources during recovery. Years of biased “community development” segregated communities of color to higher risk areas have contributed to creating distrust in government. Emergency management officials have a responsibility to integrate equity into preparedness and response to disasters by understanding the unique vulnerabilities and limitations of communities. There should be a clear recognition that the vulnerability of the community was heightened due to discriminatory policies and these communities will need the more support during a disaster.

Preparedness efforts directed to at-risk BIPOC communities prior to COVID-19’s onslaught in the United States were slow and disjointed. Clear and accurate emergency information regarding the seriousness of the threat was lacking. Black and Brown communities represented a large percentage of the essential workforce but access to essential personal protective equipment was unavailable. Public awareness messaging regarding social distancing failed to take into consideration cultural differences and living conditions of diversity communities. Data regarding the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on people of color was not regularly collected further delaying mitigation efforts. Consistent fumbled response efforts reaffirm the belief that systemic and structural issues exist within emergency management.

“*Social Equity*” is defined as the fair, just and equitable management of all institutions serving the public directly or by contract, and the fair and equitable distribution of public services, and implementation of public policy, and the commitment to promote fairness, justice, and equity in the formation of public policy (Standing Panel on Social Equity in Governance of the National Academy of Public Administration). Inequitable policies have lead to the congregation of marginalized individuals in communities across the country. Equitable emergency planning is required due to the rising frequency of extreme weather caused by climate change and disproportionate impacts based on systemic biases.

Emergency planning must understand the historic and existing barriers that create and enhance vulnerability. Disasters act as “shocks” to communities amplifying and exacerbating the existing inequities experienced by those lacking resources and excluded from “mainstream” disaster planning. Further contributing to the issue is the lack of diversity within the profession of emergency management from a racial and gender perspective. This lack of diversity combined by a failure to integrate cultural competence and fully understanding and respecting the unique attributes of communities has resulted in a disconnect leading to non-inclusive and inequitable



Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management entitled “Experiences of Vulnerable Populations during Disaster.”

The hearing will take place on Tuesday, July 28, 2020, at 10:00 a.m.

“Experiences of Vulnerable Populations During Disasters”

Testimony by Curtis Brown, State Coordinator of Emergency Management, Virginia Department of Emergency Management Testifying on Behalf of the I-DIEM

emergency plans. The negative impact on emergency management results in preparedness, mitigation, prevention, response, and recovery plans consistently falling short of meeting the needs of those individuals and communities requiring the most support. As noted in FEMA’s 2019 *Building Cultures of Preparedness: Report of the Emergency Management Higher Education Community*, “to meet the challenge, professionals in the field of emergency management must better understand the communities, peoples, and varied populations that they hope will become “better prepared.” The report also states that, “these households are not at risk simply due to their exposure when disaster threatens; they live in a state of permanent emergency resulting from socio-economic conditions and marginality that make each day precarious.” Recognition of the causality of vulnerability and intentional inclusion of diverse stakeholders is required in order to improve emergency planning and outcomes.

In recent years, numerous research findings have identified inequity as the root cause for vulnerability which results in disproportionate and sometimes fatal impacts for marginalized people include:

- *“Communities of color and other frontline communities tend to live in the most at-risk environments and are more vulnerable to the negative impacts of these kinds of events due to a range of preexisting factors.”* (Source: **NAACP In the Eye of the Storm: A People’s Guide to Transforming Crisis & Advancing Equity in the Disaster Continuum, Page 9, 2019**)
- *“These households are not at risk simply due to their exposure when disaster threatens; they live in a state of permanent emergency resulting from socio-economic conditions and marginality that make each day precarious.”* (Source: **FEMA Building Cultures of Preparedness: Report of the Emergency Management Higher Education Community, Page 8, 2019**)
- Researchers found “a consistent pattern over a 30-year period of placing hazardous waste facilities in neighborhoods where poor people and people of color live”. (Source: **2016 University of Michigan and University of Montana**)
- 3 out of 4 neighborhoods “redlined” on government maps 80 years ago continuing to struggle economically. (Source: **2018 National Community Reinvestment Coalition**)
- The vast majority of neighborhoods marked “hazardous” in red ink on maps drawn by the federal Home Owners’ Loan Corp. from 1935 to 1939 are today much more likely than other areas to comprise lower-income, minority residents. (Source: **2018 National Community Reinvestment Coalition**)



Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management entitled “Experiences of Vulnerable Populations during Disaster.”

The hearing will take place on Tuesday, July 28, 2020, at 10:00 a.m.

“Experiences of Vulnerable Populations During Disasters”

Testimony by Curtis Brown, State Coordinator of Emergency Management, Virginia Department of Emergency Management Testifying on Behalf of the I-DIEM

- People in lower income brackets often live in the most vulnerable housing and lack the resources to undertake recommended loss-reduction or evacuation measures. **(Source: Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety)**
- *“People with disabilities may be unable to undertake self-protective actions before, during or after disasters”*. According to a 2006 Census Bureau report commissioned by the National Institute on Aging, almost 20% of the U.S. population age 65 and older report some level of disability.” **(Source: Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety)**
- *“Low-income individuals and families often live in lower cost homes that are less able to withstand disasters.”* **(Source: Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety)**
- *“As sea levels rise, each of the 23 coastal states in the contiguous US faces the loss of residential and commercial properties and frequent flooding of populated areas, posing new challenges for all communities and adding particular stressors for communities of color and low-income and working-class communities.”* **(Source: Underwater: Rising Seas, Chronic Floods, and the Implications for US Coastal Real Estate, Union or Concerned Scientist, 2018)**
- *“Additionally, wildfire vulnerability is spread unequally across race and ethnicity, with census tracts that were majority Black, Hispanic or Native American experiencing ca. 50% greater vulnerability to wildfire compared to other census tracts. Embracing a social-ecological perspective of fire-prone landscapes allows for the identification of areas that are poorly equipped to respond to wildfires.”* **(Source: The unequal vulnerability of communities of color to wildfire, Ian P. Davies, Ryan D. Haugo, James C. Robertson, Phillip S. Levin, 2018)**
- *“So when natural disasters pour, literally, trillions of gallons of water onto largely Black and Latinx cities surrounded by oil and gas refineries, don’t blame Mother Nature; blame institutions, historic and systemic racism, and the people behind these institutions, systems, and history.”* **(Source: 5 Reasons Why Natural Disasters Screw Over People of Color, Yessenia Funes, 2017)**
- *“Extreme weather events impact the most vulnerable in a multiplicity of ways. In the days before, poorer people have less opportunities to evacuate as they may not have anywhere to go, cannot afford a motel out of town, or do not have a car to drive there.”* **(Source: Hurricane Harvey was a natural disaster, but a man-made catastrophe that will hurt the poor the most, Andrew Buncombe, 2017)**
- Prioritizing adaptation actions for populations that face higher risks from climate change, including low-income and marginalized communities, may prove more equitable and



Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management entitled “Experiences of Vulnerable Populations during Disaster.”
The hearing will take place on Tuesday, July 28, 2020, at 10:00 a.m.

“Experiences of Vulnerable Populations During Disasters”

Testimony by Curtis Brown, State Coordinator of Emergency Management, Virginia Department of Emergency Management Testifying on Behalf of the I-DIEM

lead, for instance, to improved infrastructure in their communities and increased focus on efforts to promote community resilience that can improve their capacity to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. **(Source: Fourth National Climate Assessment, Volume II Impacts, Risks, and Adaptation in the United States, Page 55, 2018)**

- *“Results indicate that as local hazard damages increase, so does wealth inequality, especially along lines of race, education, and homeownership. At any given level of local damage, the more aid an area receives from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the more this inequality grows. These findings suggest that two defining social problems of our day – wealth inequality and rising natural hazard damages – are dynamically linked, requiring new lines of research and policy making in the future.”* **(Source: Damages Done: The Longitudinal Impacts of Natural Hazards on Wealth Inequality in the United States, Rice U., University of Pittsburgh, 2018)**
- *“Compared to the overall U.S. population, a higher share of the population living in the combined floodplain identified as Hispanic. 25% of the population living in the combined floodplain identified as Hispanic, as compared to 17% nationally”.* **(Source: Populations in the Floodplain, NYU Furman Center, 2018)**
- *Finding 1: Natural disaster-affected areas in 2016 and 2017 differed from the U.S. overall, in notable ways:*
 - FEMA-designated disaster zip codes contained a higher share of individuals who identify as Hispanic or African American.
 - These zip codes were also more likely to contain individuals who were foreign born and speak a language other than English at home.
- *Finding 3: Disasters struck small firms across the age and income spectrum, but losses were concentrated among Hispanic-owned firms and firms in the retail and leisure & hospitality industries*
- 54% of Hispanic-owned firms in affected areas reported natural disaster-related losses, compared to 40% of White-owned firms and 35% of Black or African American owned firms. **(Source: 2017 Small Business Credit Survey (SBCS), Federal Reserve Banks)**

Root Cause of Vulnerability: Systemic Racism and History of Negative Impacts/Examples of Past and Present Inequitable Impacts (Explaining why there are disproportionate impacts)

The COVID-19 disaster has once again brought to light the glaring disparities that continue to entrap far too many communities of color in a continuous cycle of tragedy and loss. Institutional



Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management entitled “Experiences of Vulnerable Populations during Disaster.”

The hearing will take place on Tuesday, July 28, 2020, at 10:00 a.m.

“Experiences of Vulnerable Populations During Disasters”

Testimony by Curtis Brown, State Coordinator of Emergency Management, Virginia Department of Emergency Management Testifying on Behalf of the I-DIEM

racism serves as the fuel that creates the inequities that combust when disasters strike. Discriminatory economic and social policies are the root cause for the vulnerability faced by marginalized communities. Decades of divestments have created impoverished communities across the country that lack basic necessities including affordable, safe, and adequate housing. Federal and State guidance to “socially distance” to limit the spread of COVID-19 is difficult when systemic racism has confined impoverished families to occupy incredibly small living spaces. Environmental injustices have located toxic facilities in and around communities of color contributing to concentration of Black and Brown people with the same “underlining health conditions” (asthma, cancer, etc) that makes COVID-19 so fatal.

Lack of Diversity and Representation

The profession of emergency management’s lack of diversity with representation of people of color and women within its ranks prevents the field from rising to the great disaster challenges of the present and tomorrow. Research and labor data indicates that an overwhelming number of individuals, designated as “Emergency Managers” are white males. But several studies have been released over the last decade that confirms the positive impact of diversity on organizational performance. Private sector companies increase profits with more women and people of color throughout their organization, especially in positions of leadership. Though not studied as much, the impact of diversity in public service positions, such as emergency management, produces similar positive results. Racial diversity within the EM workforce improves decision-making, reduces “blind spots” errors by leveraging new perspectives, and results in better performance and improved outcomes. Within emergency management, a more diverse workforce would ensure that emergency operation and preparedness plans are inclusive and equitably consider the unique needs of communities of color. More representation of people of color in emergency management would increase the likelihood for investing greater mitigation funding into communities that have historically been divested and has contributed to increased vulnerability. A more diverse network of emergency managers at the decision-making table and in senior leadership roles would promote better response decisions such as allocating equitable resources to communities most in need and possessing the cultural competence to effectively engage diverse communities. Short-term and long-term recovery would be improved by the participation of people of color that have a connection to the communities most impacted. Simply put, diversity in emergency management will help to reverse the existing failure to enact equitable practices before, during, and after disasters.



Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management entitled “Experiences of Vulnerable Populations during Disaster.”
The hearing will take place on Tuesday, July 28, 2020, at 10:00 a.m.

“Experiences of Vulnerable Populations During Disasters”

Testimony by Curtis Brown, State Coordinator of Emergency Management, Virginia Department of Emergency Management Testifying on Behalf of the I-DIEM

Recommendations for Integrating Equity to support At-Risk Populations

Dismantling the systemic and structural inequities in each phase of emergency management (preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery) requires significant commitment, resources, and time. The inequities have been embedded and institutionalized for many years so the solutions will not be quick and require more than “lip service” or “check the box” efforts that do nothing more than further institutional inequitable practices. I-DIEM’s hope is that the COVID-19 disaster and recent focus on equity by a broader audience will lead to dramatic and fundamental changes to all aspects of disaster management. The entire Emergency Management Enterprise (Federal, State, local, non-profit, and private) must prioritize and embed equity as a core part of all its responsibilities. Emergency management leaders should be held accountable with performance measures aligned to equitable practices and outcomes. Emergency managers are unable to make sustained changes alone. Political leaders on all levels of government must provide the resources and prioritize equity as critical function of government.

There have been positive actions taken in recent years to embed equity into emergency management which serve as great examples or implementation nationally. The Commonwealth of Virginia created a Health Equity Working Group (HEWG) as a key component of the COVID-19 Unified Command (UC) response. Led by a multi-agency leadership team that includes representatives from the Governor’s Chief Diversity Office, Virginia Department of Health-Office of Health Equity, and Virginia Department of Emergency Management, the Health Equity Working Group was initially created at the beginning of the COVID-19 response due to the recognition of inequitable impacts and the need to embed equity into all aspects of the disaster response. The Health Equity Working Group reports directly to the UC leadership and have designed innovative programs to support those most in need. The purpose of HEWG is to apply a health equity lens to the Commonwealth of Virginia’s COVID-19 response by proactively and reactively:

- Identifying and prioritizing resources and decision points impacting marginalized and at-risk individuals and communities.
- Supporting intentional inclusion of the needs of at-risk and marginalized individuals and communities within each working group related to preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery.



Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management entitled “Experiences of Vulnerable Populations during Disaster.”

The hearing will take place on Tuesday, July 28, 2020, at 10:00 a.m.

“Experiences of Vulnerable Populations During Disasters”

Testimony by Curtis Brown, State Coordinator of Emergency Management, Virginia Department of Emergency Management Testifying on Behalf of the I-DIEM

In Houston, officials are integrating equity into flood protection efforts by prioritizing communities of color which have historically excluded from mitigation efforts in the past. City officials are removing the normal cost-benefit ratio that has prioritized more valuable housing properties which tended to only benefit wealthy and white areas. Instead of prioritizing spending to protect the most valuable properties, that tended to exclude communities of color, the intentional focus and priority has been placed to target communities “that would have the hardest time recovering, including communities of color” (Source: A Climate Plan in Texas Focuses on Minorities. Not Everyone Likes It. Christopher Flavelle. New York Times, 7/24/29). This type of bold mitigation action is necessary due to the increasing number of extreme weather events due to climate change that will disproportionately impact vulnerable communities. Funding priorities should focus on the communities most in need. Dedicating pre-disaster mitigation funding in the most at-risk areas will reduce cost long-term and improve disaster outcomes.

Below are several recommendations for sustainably integrating equity into each phase of emergency management:

- Integrate Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity as Foundational Goal and Responsibility of Emergency Management.
- Prioritize Vulnerable and Underserved Populations in all planning and grant programs.
- Thoroughly review all current emergency management laws and policies through an equity lens, including identifying the intended and unintended effects of current policies on marginalized on individuals and communities.
- Integrate equity and cultural competence into the current FEMA doctrine, training and educational programs, including incentivizing equity in grants programs, to influence sustainable changes throughout the Emergency Management Enterprise.
- Integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion, and information on disproportionate impacts of disasters into FEMA’s planning, exercises, guidance and priorities.
- Include the addition of equity-related performance measures in emergency management grants and other funding requirements.
- Invest in innovative technology to conduct predictive modeling to identify potential inequitable outcomes.
- Ensure continuous use of Social Vulnerability Assessments and Community Engagement to identify and understand the needs of vulnerable individuals and communities.



Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management entitled “Experiences of Vulnerable Populations during Disaster.”
The hearing will take place on Tuesday, July 28, 2020, at 10:00 a.m.

“Experiences of Vulnerable Populations During Disasters”

Testimony by Curtis Brown, State Coordinator of Emergency Management, Virginia Department of Emergency Management Testifying on Behalf of the I-DIEM

- Commitment to enhance efforts to promoting diversity within the Emergency Management Profession by increasing the number of people of color and women, especially in positions of leadership.
- Leverage Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion experts and engage marginalized communities when making any changes to policies and plans.
- Increase the number of Small, Minority, and Woman-owned Businesses in FEMA procurement opportunities
- Fund efforts to increase research and improve datasets on equity and disproportionate impacts of disasters

Stafford Act Changes

The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act provide critical support to states, tribes, and local governments when a federal emergency declaration is issued. Since its creation in the 1950s, the Stafford Act has evolved based on increasing disasters, failures, and lessons learned. The next evolution of the Stafford Act should intentionally focus on equity and disproportionate impacts of disasters to eliminate any barriers that negatively impacts vulnerable individuals and communities.

- Require equitable delivery of Stafford Act services equitably.
- FEMA updates policy guidance for the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program to dedicate the majority of funding to support marginalized communities that will be disproportionately during disasters
- Better leverage FEMA’s Office of Civil Rights to ensure equity is integrated into the delivery of all Stafford Act related response, recovery, and mitigation programs.
- Equitably adjust caps for federal assistance to recognize that at-risk individuals and communities need more support for longer periods of time.
- Create additional provision so FEMA can provide equitable support for long-term housing recovery efforts.
- FEMA should ensure match requirements are equitable and consider the limited resources of different stakeholders
- Provide additional support or allow under-resourced local governments to follow State Procurement requirements instead of 44 CFR since many lack adequate number of staff capable to navigate all the requirements.



Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management entitled “Experiences of Vulnerable Populations during Disaster.”

The hearing will take place on Tuesday, July 28, 2020, at 10:00 a.m.

“Experiences of Vulnerable Populations During Disasters”

Testimony by Curtis Brown, State Coordinator of Emergency Management, Virginia Department of Emergency Management Testifying on Behalf of the I-DIEM

- Ensure the integration of equity into the delivery public assistance and individual assistance program to provide additional resources and support for vulnerable communities.
- Eliminate the preference for homeowners in the Individual Assistance Program which has been found to be biased against communities of color and contributes to the expansion of wealth inequality.
- Ensure FEMA equitably considers the diverse resource, capacity, and limitations of communities its support and has resources and authority to provide additional support.

The Fierce Urgency of Now

Fifteen years have passed since Hurricane Katrina battered New Orleans resulting in over 3,000 fatalities, mostly within the Black community. Since then there are have been other major natural disasters that resulted in disproportionate impacts on at-risk population, in terms of both lives lost and economically. Unfortunately, these numerous events and lives lost have not prompted a major change in existing emergency management approaches. It has become painfully clear that effective disaster management requires a new, equitable approach that understands the unique circumstances of the individuals and communities in order to prioritize their needs. The emergency management tactics in recent years have proven ineffective in many cases because false assumptions have been made about the ability of individuals and communities who are already suffering to survive disaster impacts. Political leaders, policymakers, and emergency managers can no longer turn a blind eye to the reoccurring disproportionate impact of disasters on vulnerable populations. New and innovative equitable practices must be integrated and prioritized in emergency management in order for dramatic and sustainable changes to be made to build resilience in the most at-risk communities. As the COVID-19 response continues and the heart of hurricane season starts, the transition to equitable disaster approaches should begin now. There is a “fierce urgency of now” that requires all levels of government to take action before the next disaster continues the horrible, unjust, and disproportionate cycle of loss in vulnerable populations.