

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 17, 2025

The Honorable Kristi Noem
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue, S.E.
Washington, D.C., 20528

Mr. David Richardson
Senior Official Performing the Duties of Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street SW
Washington, D.C., 20472

Dear Secretary Noem and Mr. Richardson:

We write with urgent concern that the Trump Administration has retaliated against federal employees for exercising their rights to make protected whistleblower disclosures. On August 25, 2025, our offices received a letter from more than 190 employees at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) warning that the Trump Administration had reversed much of the progress in disaster response and recovery achieved since Hurricane Katrina, and that the country is thus currently ill-prepared for another disaster.¹ This type of disclosure to Congress is protected by law.² One day later, however, all public signers of the letter were placed on indefinite administrative leave without valid cause.³ We demand that you immediately reinstate all of these employees' regular status immediately. In addition, we request information from your offices regarding these illegal actions.

In their disclosure, 34 public and 156 anonymous FEMA employees described six areas in which the Trump Administration's actions are damaging FEMA's ability to do its job. These include cascading policy decisions ranging from reduction in capacity, the elimination of mitigation programs, to the restriction of resources.⁴ All of these combine to render FEMA employees incapable of fulfilling the Agency's mission to help people before, during, and after disasters.⁵ These whistleblowers sent this letter to raise alarms, with hopes that their warning

¹ See Stand Up for Science, *The Katrina Declaration* (Aug. 25, 2025) (online at www.standupforscience.net/fema-katrina-declaration).

² 5 U.S.C. 2302(b)(8)-(9), Pub. L. No. 101-12 as amended.

³ Memorandum from Jay Scallan, Federal Emergency Management Agency, to [Redacted] Staff, Federal Emergency Management Agency (Aug. 26, 2025) (online at <https://whistleblower.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/2025-09-02-FEMA-Disclosure-Letter.pdf>).

⁴ See Stand Up for Science, *The Katrina Declaration* (Aug. 25, 2025) (online at www.standupforscience.net/fema-katrina-declaration).

⁵ *Id.*

would improve disaster preparedness and response, and save lives when the next disaster strikes.⁶

On August 26, 2025, the public signers of the letter were put on administrative leave by FEMA's parent agency, DHS, "[e]ffective immediately, and continuing until further notice."⁷ The letter to staff stated that, while on leave, the individuals:

[W]ill conduct no business, visit no FEMA/DHS facility, contact no FEMA/DHS personnel, and take no action in your official capacity, except to respond to inquiries or instructions from FEMA and/or DHS, direct questions to FEMA human resources representatives, and/or exercise your legal rights.⁸

The letter also urges any individual placed on administrative leave status to "keep this matter as confidential as possible."⁹ We are greatly concerned that this request for confidentiality could signal an intent to further retaliate against dissenting employees, silence whistleblowers, and undermine whistleblower protections, while avoiding the public's scrutiny.

The actions taken by FEMA against the public signers of the letter was plainly retaliatory. These employees are whistleblowers, and are protected under law. The Whistleblower Protection Act shields individuals who provide information to Congress that they reasonably believe evidences gross mismanagement, gross waste of federal funds, abuse of authority, and a substantial and specific danger to health and public safety, as well as a violation of any law, rule, or regulation.¹⁰

FEMA employees spoke up directly because the mismanagement at the agency is putting American lives at risk. FEMA's current mismanagement and lack of preparedness ahead of disasters undercuts the federal government's ability to respond effectively and could result in a significant loss of life. In addition, the actions your offices took will produce a chilling effect on any civil servant who wishes to respectfully dissent or provide competing opinions to the Administration, even if backed by evidence. Instead of taking these concerns seriously, FEMA put staff on leave when the agency is already suffering from the loss of 2,000 employees since the start of the Trump administration, including senior leadership.¹¹

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Memorandum from Jay Scallan, Federal Emergency Management Agency, to [Redacted] Staff, Federal Emergency Management Agency (Aug. 26, 2025) (online at <https://whistleblower.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/2025-09-02-FEMA-Disclosure-Letter.pdf>); See Stand Up for Science, *The Katrina Declaration* (Aug. 25, 2025) (online at www.standupforscience.net/fema-katrina-declaration).

⁸ Memorandum from Jay Scallan, Federal Emergency Management Agency, to [Redacted] Staff, Federal Emergency Management Agency (Aug. 26, 2025) (online at <https://whistleblower.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/2025-09-02-FEMA-Disclosure-Letter.pdf>).

⁹ Memorandum from Jay Scallan, Federal Emergency Management Agency, to [Redacted] Staff, Federal Emergency Management Agency (Aug. 26, 2025) (online at <https://whistleblower.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/2025-09-02-FEMA-Disclosure-Letter.pdf>).

¹⁰ 5 U.S.C. 2302.

¹¹ *FEMA Employees Warn That Trump Is Gutting Disaster Response*, The New York Times (Aug. 25, 2025) (online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/25/climate/fema-employees-letter-trump-katrina.html>).

You must follow the law and return these employees to their regular status immediately. In addition, we request a written response no later than October 1, 2025, including:

1. A detailed explanation of the alleged basis for illegally placing protected whistleblowers on administrative leave;
2. A detailed explanation of the intent for which you have asked targeted FEMA employees to “keep this matter as confidential as possible;” and
3. A detailed plan for how you intend to ensure compliance with the Whistleblower Protection Act moving forward.¹²

We look forward to your prompt response. If you have any questions, please contact Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Democratic staff at (202) 226-8776, Oversight and Government Reform Committee Democratic staff at (202) 225-5051, and Homeland Security Committee Democratic staff at (202)226-2616.

Sincerely,



Rick Larsen
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure



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



Robert Garcia
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight, and
Government Reform



Bennie Thompson
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security

¹² Memorandum from Jay Scallan, Federal Emergency Management Agency, to [Redacted] Staff, Federal Emergency Management Agency (Aug. 26, 2025) (online at <https://whistleblower.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/2025-09-02-FEMA-Disclosure-Letter.pdf>).

cc: Chairman Sam Graves, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Chairman James Comer, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Chairman Andrew Garbarino, Committee on Homeland Security