

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 9, 2025

Ms. Laura Grimm
Chief of Staff Performing the Duties of
Under Secretary of Commerce for
Oceans and Atmosphere and
NOAA Administrator
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20230

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

Dear Ms. Grimm and Mr. Richardson:

We write with heavy hearts following the devastating flooding along the Guadalupe River and surrounding areas in Texas. The tragic loss of life has left families and communities shattered, and we extend our deepest condolences to those mourning the loss of loved ones. This disaster underscores the urgent need to examine the local, state, and federal response and ensure that every possible measure is taken to prevent such loss in the future. It is imperative that every federal agency with a role in extreme weather event forecasting, response, and recovery be fully equipped to fulfill its responsibilities to keep Americans safe.

Based on currently available information, we understand the following timeline of events:

Wednesday, July 2: The Texas Division of Emergency Management activated state emergency response resources in anticipation of flooding.¹ The National Weather Service (NWS) Austin/San Antonio issued a forecast on X warning of “scattered moderate to heavy showers” expanding into the Hill Country.²

Thursday, July 3: The Texas Department of Emergency Management contacted local officials in the Hill Country, notifying them of potential flooding. In accordance with state law, evacuation orders were left to the discretion of local authorities; no evacuation orders were issued.³

- At 1:18 p.m., the NWS Austin/San Antonio office issued a flood watch.⁴
- At 6:10 p.m., the NWS Weather Prediction Center warned of “heavy rainfall” and “flash flooding likely.”⁵

¹ Texas Division of Emergency Management. July 2, 2025. <https://tdem.texas.gov/press-release/7-2-25>

² NWS Austin/San Antonio X profile. July 2, 2025. <https://x.com/NWSSanAntonio/status/1940511170886291730>

³ NPR. *Here's a Timeline of the Catastrophic Texas Floods*. July 6, 2025. <https://www.npr.org/2025/07/05/nx-s1-5457759/texas-floods-timeline>

⁴ Id.

⁵ Id.

- At 11:42 p.m., the NWS issued a flash flood warning, indicating imminent or ongoing flooding.⁶

Friday, July 4:

- At 1:14 a.m., the NWS issued a second flash flood warning—this was the first Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) sent to cell phones in the area.⁷
- At 4:15 a.m., the NWS issued a flash flood emergency, a rare and severe alert indicating a catastrophic threat to human life.⁸

Reporting indicates that Kerr County emergency management did not utilize FEMA’s Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) to send emergency text alerts. The only alerts received by the public via cell phones were those issued by the National Weather Service.⁹

Unfortunately, just as we are seeing how devastating the consequences of extreme weather are, the federal government is in the process of shrinking or eliminating the resources available to warn the public and to aid recovery. As recently as last month, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Kristi Noem reiterated her intent to eliminate FEMA, with President Trump’s full-throated endorsement.¹⁰ This would be an unmitigated, unforced disaster, and it would certainly exacerbate the toll of extreme weather events. While this Administration has paid lip service to the importance of the NWS, it, too, has been hammered by staff departures and demoralization.¹¹ It would be unconscionable to face the next extreme weather event with a FEMA and NWS that are anything less than fully resourced to respond from the earliest forecast through the last delivery of relief.

As part of our constitutional responsibility to conduct oversight, we respectfully request answers to the following questions:

1. The National Weather Service confirmed plans to fill 126 vacancies on June 2.¹² What progress has been made to fill these positions? Please provide the positions locations and the technical roles involved.

⁶ Id.

⁷ CBS. *Deadly Texas Flood Raise Questions About Emergency Alerts and Whether Staffing Cuts Affected Forecasts and Warnings*. July 7, 2025. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/texas-floods-emergency-alerts-weather-forecast-staffing-budget/>

⁸ Id.

⁹ Id.

¹⁰ The Hill. *Trump and Noem Detail Planned FEMA Changes: ‘We’re Going to Give out Less Money*. June 10, 2025. <https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/5343144-trump-noem-fema-dhs-hurricane-season/>

¹¹ The New York Times. *As Floods Hit, Key Roles Were Vacant at Weather Service Offices in Texas*. July 5, 2025. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/05/us/politics/texas-floods-warnings-vacancies.html>

¹² The Hill. *Weather Service Rehiring at Offices Left “Critically Understaffed” by Layoffs*. June 2, 2025. <https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/5329625-nws-seeks-hire-126-people/>

2. It has been reported that the NWS Warning Coordination Meteorologist position in San Antonio was vacant during the flooding.¹³ How was critical information communicated to Texas emergency management and public safety officials? Please include all written communications (e.g., emails) between the NWS and Texas officials from July 2–4.
3. Did Kerr County submit any IPAWS alerts to FEMA for review or dissemination between July 2–5, 2025?
4. Has the State of Texas ever applied for FEMA funding to improve emergency alert and warning systems in the Hill Country, including Kerr County?
5. Has David Richardson, the Senior Official Performing the Duties of FEMA Administrator, visited Kerr County to oversee response efforts? If not, are there plans for a visit?
6. Pursuant to the Stafford Act, the FEMA Administrator serves as the federal lead following a disaster. Is David Richardson currently fulfilling this statutory responsibility?
7. Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem has instituted a policy requiring all departmental grant payments exceeding \$100,000, including FEMA grants, receive approval from the Secretary’s office. Will this policy apply to disaster relief funds for Texas? If so, how will FEMA and the Department ensure that this additional review does not delay urgently needed aid? If not, what process did DHS follow to grant a waiver of this requirement?
8. How many FEMA personnel have been deployed to support disaster response efforts in Texas? Were any of these staff reassigned from other ongoing disaster responses?
9. Has FEMA’s response been in any way altered or constrained due to President Trump’s reported plan to phase out FEMA following this hurricane season?

We appreciate your prompt attention to these questions, so we can work together to ensure the safety of the American people this disaster season. Please provide a written response no later than July 22, 2025.

Sincerely,



Rick Larsen
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure



Zoe Lofgren
Ranking Member
Committee on Science Space &
Technology

¹³ NBC. *National Weather Service Defends its Flood Warnings Amid Fresh Scrutiny of Trump Staff Cuts*. July 6, 2025. <https://www.nbcnews.com/science/science-news/national-weather-service-nws-staff-cuts-trump-budget-texas-floods-rcna217139>



Greg Stanton
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