

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:

AGING

AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION,
AND FORESTRY

BANKING

FINANCE

June 5, 2025

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

Dear Secretary Noem,

As the 2025 Atlantic hurricane season begins this week,¹ and following Acting Administrator Richardson's stunning and disturbing reported admission that he was unaware the United States has a hurricane season,² I write with deep concern about the Trump administration's efforts to dismantle the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the potentially devastating consequences for Georgia communities.

Nearly a year ago, in September 2024, Georgia and the entire southeast were bombarded by Hurricane Helene – a multi-state major disaster and the deadliest storm to strike the mainland United States in 20 years.³ At its peak, Hurricane Helene left more than 1 million Georgians without power, demanded 300 boil water advisories across the state, damaged over 200,000 homes, and left thousands of families displaced.⁴

Fortunately, thanks to an early presence in Georgia and a “great” working relationship with the Georgia Emergency Management Agency and state leadership,⁵ FEMA was prepared to quickly mobilize assistance teams, deliver meals and water to the hardest-hit areas, and coordinate response and recovery efforts with state, local, and nonprofit leaders.⁶ Most importantly, FEMA

¹ *NOAA Predicts Above-normal 2025 Atlantic Hurricane Season*, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (May 22, 2025), <https://www.noaa.gov/news-release/noaa-predicts-above-normal-2025-atlantic-hurricane-season>.

² Christopher Flavelle and Lisa Friedman, *Acting FEMA Chief Told Staff He Didn't Know About U.S. Hurricane Season*, The New York Times (Jun. 2, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/02/us/politics/fema-david-richardson-hurricane-season.html>.

³ *Tropical Cyclone Report: Hurricane Helene*, National Hurricane Center (Apr. 8, 2025), https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/data/tcr/AL092024_Helene.pdf; Kala Hunter, *Trump Thinks FEMA Should Go Away. Did The Agency Do Its Job Georgia in 2024?*, Ledger-Enquirer (Mar. 3, 2025), <https://www.ledger-enquirer.com/news/environment/article301192709.html>.

⁴ Fernando Cervantes, Jr. and Eric Lagatta, *Georgia Power Outage Map: Track Outages After Helene Rips Through The Southeast*, USA Today (Sep. 28, 2024), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/weather/2024/09/27/georgia-power-outage-map-helene-aftermath/75401883007>; Sam Gringlas, *Helene Death Toll Jumps To 25 in Georgia, Over 100 Across The Southeast*, WABE (Sep. 30, 2024), <https://www.wabe.org/helene-death-toll-jumps-to-25-in-georgia-over-100-across-the-southeast>.

⁵ *Georgia Governor Talks About Conversation with President Joe Biden*, 11Alive (Sep. 30, 2024), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n78zi69WMwg>.

⁶ *Federal Assistance for Hurricane Helene Survivors Surpasses \$137 Million as Biden-Harris Administration Continues Response and Recovery Efforts in Southeast and Closely Monitors Storm in the Gulf*, Federal Emergency

remained in Georgia long after the national cameras left, helping Georgians along their road to recovery and hosting resource fairs for impacted communities on everything from applications for individual assistance to small business loans to housing needs.⁷ To date, FEMA has provided over \$360 million to survivors and more than \$400 million to local governments and communities in Georgia.⁸ Though not perfect, this effort required a level of coordination across state lines, rapid mobilization of personnel and supplies, and deep experience that only the federal government and FEMA can provide.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the 2025 Atlantic hurricane season will likely be “above normal” and feature up to ten hurricanes, including five major storms that will threaten Georgia and much of the southeast.⁹ However, instead of working with state and local governments, nonprofits, and federal partners to prepare for the 2025 hurricane season, the Trump administration and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) have haphazardly and irresponsibly worked to dismantle the nation’s lead disaster response agency without any workable alternative or sense of direction.

These reckless actions include:

- Proposing a \$646 million budget cut to FEMA in Fiscal Year (FY) 2026,¹⁰ along with the cancellation of billions in disaster relief and mitigation grants that help states prepare for future disasters;¹¹
- Gutting FEMA’s workforce by nearly 30 percent, including more than 1,800 voluntary buyouts, 200 terminations, a hiring freeze, the departure of 16 senior officials,¹² as well as the abrupt firing of FEMA’s administrator who warned against eliminating the agency;¹³

Management Agency (Oct. 6, 2024), <https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20241006/federal-assistance-hurricane-helene-survivors-surpasses-137-million-biden>.

⁷ *FEMA is Still in Georgia to Help Applicants*, Federal Emergency Management Agency (Mar. 4, 2025), <https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20250404/fema-still-georgia-help-applicants>; *FEMA to Host Housing Resource Fair May 16-17 in Valdosta*, Federal Emergency Management Agency (May 13, 2025), <https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20250513/fema-host-housing-resource-fair-may-16-17-valdosta>.

⁸ *Georgia Survivors Have Received More Than \$549 Million for Helene Recovery*, Federal Emergency Management Agency (May 13, 2025), <https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20250506/georgia-survivors-have-received-more-549-million-helene-recovery>.

⁹ *NOAA Predicts Above-normal 2025 Atlantic Hurricane Season*, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (May 22, 2025).

¹⁰ *Fiscal Year 2026 Discretionary Budget Request*, Office of Management and Budget (May 2, 2025), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Fiscal-Year-2026-Discretionary-Budget-Request.pdf>.

¹¹ *Edwards, Colleagues Lead Bipartisan, Bicameral Effort Calling on DHS to Reinstate Disaster Mitigation Program*, Office of Congressman Chuck Edwards (May 13, 2025), <https://edwards.house.gov/media/press-releases/edwards-colleagues-lead-bipartisan-bicameral-effort-calling-dhs-reinstate>.

¹² *Dinah Voyles Pulver, Amidst FEMA Staff cuts, Worries Grow About Summer Hurricane, Tornado Seasons*, USA Today (May 2, 2025), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2025/05/01/fema-staff-cuts-agencys-future-uncertain/83267759007>.

¹³ *Justin Doubleday, Trump Admin Fires Acting FEMA Administrator After House Hearing*, Federal News Network (May 8, 2025), <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/management/2025/05/trump-admin-fires-acting-fema-administrator-after-house-hearing>.

- Pursuing ill-conceived, shortsighted, and abrupt changes to longstanding FEMA policy, including quadrupling the damage threshold for Georgia communities to receive federal assistance from roughly \$21 million to more than \$84 million;¹⁴
- Canceling hurricane readiness trainings for state and local emergency managers in Georgia and across the country;¹⁵ and,
- Eliminating the disaster resiliency-focused Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program, including a \$30 million award to reduce flooding in Savannah, Georgia.¹⁶

I am always open to considering thoughtful, transparent reforms developed in close partnership with Congress, states, and local officials, but these unilateral actions are gambling with the lives and livelihoods of millions of Georgians. As DHS’s own internal agency review states, “FEMA is not ready” for the upcoming hurricane season – a frightening assessment that I fear will soon have severe consequences in Georgia and southeastern coastal states.¹⁷

To that end, I request answers to the following questions by June 26, 2025, so that Georgians may better understand how your actions will affect their safety during the 2025 hurricane season:

1. How would a budget cut of \$646 million, as proposed in your FY26 budget request, help FEMA better prepare for and respond to future disasters in Georgia?
 - a. What analyses did DHS conduct to ensure that these budget cuts will not diminish the safety of Americans during hurricane season?
2. Please provide any policy justification or budget analysis supporting the cancellation of hurricane readiness trainings for state and local officials, including how such cancellations better prepare local communities for hurricane season.¹⁸ In the absence of such trainings, how does DHS intend to ensure that local officials are prepared for hurricane season?

¹⁴ Gabe Cohen and Ella Nilsen, *Trump Officials Discuss Making It Much Harder to Qualify for Federal Disaster Assistance, Starting This Hurricane Season*, CNN (Apr. 25, 2025), <https://www.cnn.com/2025/04/25/politics/fema-aid-disaster-assistance-memo/index.html>.

¹⁵ Leah Douglas, et al., *FEMA Cuts Emergency Training Under Trump as Hurricane Season Looms*, Reuters (May 11, 2025), <https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/fema-cuts-emergency-training-hurricane-season-looms-2025-05-11>.

¹⁶ Shea Schrader, *FEMA Cuts \$30 Million Grant Earmarked to Improve Flooding, Drainage Issues in Savannah*, WTOC (Apr. 7, 2025), <https://www.wtoc.com/2025/04/07/fema-cuts-30-million-grant-earmarked-improve-flooding-drainage-issues-savannah>.

¹⁷ Rachel Frazin, *Internal Document Warns ‘FEMA Is Not Ready’ for Hurricane Season*, The Hill (May 16, 2025), <https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/5304570-fema-hurricane-season-dhs-noem-trump-noaa>.

¹⁸ *FEMA Cuts Emergency Training Under Trump as Hurricane Season Looms*, Reuters (May 11, 2025).

3. Of the FEMA employees who were terminated or accepted voluntary buyouts, how many performed a hurricane preparedness, logistic, or safety function, including those who collaborated with state and local governments before, during, and after a disaster?
4. What analyses, if any, has DHS conducted to assess the impact of implemented and proposed workforce reductions on FEMA's ability to perform its emergency management functions? Please provide copies of any written communications, analyses, and other documentation concerning how workforce reductions will limit FEMA's ability to carry out its core functions.
5. How many counties in Georgia that received federal assistance in the aftermath of previous disasters would have been denied that assistance if FEMA's proposal to quadruple the damage threshold had been implemented prior to those disasters? Please provide a list of affected disasters and Georgia counties, including how much federal disaster assistance would have been lost by each county under FEMA's new proposed threshold.
 - a. What public process or consultation, if any, did FEMA conduct before proposing an increase to the per capita impact indicator threshold?
6. Please provide a cost-benefit analysis supporting the cancellation of the BRIC program and awarded projects like Savannah, Georgia's flood reduction measures, including how such cancellations make communities like Savannah more resilient and safer in the event of a severe storm.¹⁹
7. What contingency plans are in place if FEMA staff and resources are overwhelmed during the 2025 hurricane season?
8. Are there plans to further adjust or reduce staffing at FEMA's Region IV office in Atlanta, Georgia, which oversees disaster response for all of Georgia and much of the southeast?
 - a. Will you commit to ensuring this office remains fully staffed and resourced for the duration of the 2025 hurricane season?

Sincerely,



Reverend Raphael Warnock
United States Senator

¹⁹ *FEMA Cuts \$30 Million Grant Earmarked to Improve Flooding, Drainage Issues in Savannah*, WTOC (Apr. 7, 2025).