

RAPHAEL G. WARNOCK
GEORGIA

SUITE 717
HART SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510
(202) 224-3643

201 17TH STREET NW, SUITE 530
ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30363
(770) 694-7828

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:
AGING

AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION,
AND FORESTRY

BANKING

FINANCE

August 6, 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,

I write to urge you to provide assurances to the people of Georgia that the Trump administration is willing and able to support them during the 2025 Atlantic hurricane season. Unfortunately, your July 11, 2025 response to my June 5, 2025 letter failed to provide information about the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) current disaster preparedness capabilities or address the potentially devastating effects that efforts to dismantle FEMA will have on Georgians. The stakes are too high to leave the communities I care about without clear answers, a sense of accountability, or a plan, so I write again to seek answers, particularly in light of recent deadly flooding across the country.

We are now well into what the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration projects will be an above-average hurricane season,¹ and yet you have neither clarified why an internal agency review determined that "FEMA is not ready,"² nor explained how FEMA will respond if the Southeast faces another catastrophic storm like Hurricane Helene.³ This lack of transparency heightens public anxiety and erodes public confidence in our emergency systems at a time when Georgia families are looking to their government for clarity and direction. The residents of Georgia and other coastal states deserve to know whether their government is prepared to support them in the face of disaster. If the actions of this administration have rendered FEMA unable to fulfill its mission, then our state and local governments deserve to know, so they can prepare to provide life saving aid where the Trump administration will not.

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 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>.

³ 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>.

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:
AGING

AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION,
AND FORESTRY

BANKING

FINANCE

Just last month, catastrophic flooding in Texas claimed the lives of at least 130 people.⁴ This heartbreaking loss of life illustrates how quickly disasters can overwhelm state and local capacity and why a strong federal response is essential. These deadly floods tragically demonstrate why the Trump administration's decision to eliminate a \$30 million Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant to reduce flooding in Savannah, Georgia—a fully approved project designed to save lives in one of the Southeast's most vulnerable coastal cities—is all the more difficult to understand.⁵

Your refusal to reinstate funding for Savannah, Georgia to mitigate flood risks and potentially save lives, coupled with your unwillingness thus far to articulate a clear plan for FEMA's capabilities or future, continues to run afoul of the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) statutory mission to protect all Americans. Your job is to keep Americans safe here at home, and thus far, you are falling short of this sacred duty.

Your response to my June 5, 2025 letter pointed to the President's establishment of the Council to Assess FEMA, which you co-chair, as a justification for proposed and implemented changes.⁶ This Council is responsible for conducting "a full-scale review of FEMA," developing recommendations, and producing a report by November 16, 2025, just two weeks before hurricane season officially ends.⁷ Meanwhile, the Trump administration has already proposed and implemented dramatic, top-down changes to FEMA's staffing,⁸ budget,⁹ and policies,¹⁰ long

⁴ *Kerr County updates: Crews continue searching as the number of missing drops to 97*, KENS 5 (Jul. 15, 2025), <https://www.kens5.com/article/news/state/texas-news/texas-flood/kerr-county-updates-search-and-recovery-july-fourth-floods-texas/273-e63f6a3f-4614-4ab6-937a-c08e8878269f>.

⁵ 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>.

⁶ *Executive Order 14180, Council to Assess the Federal Emergency Management Agency*, The White House (Jan. 24, 2025), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/council-to-assess-the-federal-emergency-management-agency>.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ 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>; 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>.

⁹ *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>.

¹⁰ 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>; 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>; 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>.

before this Council has even issued a single recommendation. That disconnect raises serious questions about whether this process is truly driven by evidence and stakeholder engagement.

In your response, you also said that FEMA must be “survivor-centric.”¹¹ I agree, but being survivor-centric means investing in our communities *before* disaster strikes to improve the chances of survival. Pre-disaster mitigation is the most survivor-centric policy we have, and eliminating BRIC—FEMA’s most comprehensive disaster mitigation and preparedness program—and proposing cuts to Flood Mitigation Assistance funding for 2025 strips Georgia communities of the tools they need to save lives.¹² Moreover, telling local governments to “use existing grant funding” for first responder training is no substitute for a serious disaster management strategy.¹³ As any disaster response expert will tell you: what we do before the storm is just as, if not more, important as what we do after. Instead, your changes undermine the very foundation of a survivor-centric approach.

While I remain concerned that the Trump administration’s recent decisions are jeopardizing the lives and livelihoods of Georgians as they prepare to weather the next storm, I am committed to engaging in good faith with you and the entire Trump administration on disaster mitigation, response, and reform. In fact, I welcome thoughtful, transparent reforms developed in close partnership with Congress, states, and local officials.

But serious accountability requires serious answers. Your response, which offered little in the way of concrete information or assurances that the constituents we both represent deserve from their government, only reinforced my concern that this administration is making critical decisions without adequate public explanation or engagement while Georgians’ lives are on the line.

Please find attached my original questions, along with new questions made more urgent by the terrible situation in Texas. I respectfully request a full, substantive response—including data, documentation, and justification—by September 6, 2025:

1. In light of recent deadly flooding in Texas, will DHS commit to reinstating the \$30 million BRIC grant awarded to the City of Savannah?

¹¹ Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem, *Response Letter Regarding the Federal Emergency Management Agency*, Department of Homeland Security (Jul. 11, 2025).

¹² Will Curran-Groome, Andrew Rumbach, and Sara McTarnaghan, *FEMA Is Eliminating Hazard Mitigation Programs, Leaving Americans Nationwide at Risk as Disasters Worsen*, Urban Institute (Apr. 18, 2025), <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/fema-eliminating-hazard-mitigation-programs-leaving-americans-nationwide-risk-disasters>.

¹³ Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem, *Response Letter Regarding the Federal Emergency Management Agency*, Department of Homeland Security (Jul. 11, 2025).

- a. If not, how does FEMA justify eliminating a fully approved, life-saving mitigation project in one of the Southeast's most flood-prone cities?
 - b. 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.¹⁴
2. If the genuine purpose of the Council is to determine whether FEMA's current structure serves the American people, why is DHS already gutting FEMA before the Council has completed its work?

Questions from my June 5, 2025 letter:

3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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.
6. 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.

¹⁴ 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-floodingdrainage-issues-savannah>.

RAPHAEL G. WARNOCK
GEORGIA

SUITE 717
HART SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510
(202) 224-3643

201 17TH STREET NW, SUITE 530
ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30363
(770) 694-7828

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:
AGING

AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION,
AND FORESTRY

BANKING

FINANCE

- a. What public process or consultation, if any, did FEMA conduct before proposing an increase to the per capita impact indicator threshold?
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