

**FEMA: BUILDING A WORKFORCE PREPARED AND
READY TO RESPOND**

JOINT HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS,
RESPONSE, AND RECOVERY
AND THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
OVERSIGHT, MANAGEMENT,
AND ACCOUNTABILITY
OF THE
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FEMA: BUILDING A WORKFORCE PREPARED AND READY TO RESPOND

Thursday, January 20, 2022

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS, RESPONSE,
AND RECOVERY, AND THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT, MANAGEMENT, AND
ACCOUNTABILITY,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittees met, pursuant to notice, at 10:01 a.m., via Webex, Hon. Val Butler Demings [Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery] presiding.

Present from the Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery: Representatives Demings, Jackson Lee, Payne, Cammack, Higgins, Miller-Meeks, and Garbarino.

Present from the Subcommittee on Oversight, Management, and Accountability: Representatives Correa, Titus, Meijer, Bishop, and Harshbarger.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. The Subcommittees on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery and Oversight, Management, and Accountability will come to order. Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare the subcommittees in recess at any point. Good morning to everyone and thank you all so much for joining us today.

We are here to discuss the Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA, its work force. This topic is incredibly timely given the tornadoes that struck southwest Florida Sunday morning, destroying dozens of homes and leaving thousands without power in Lee and Charlotte Counties. My thoughts are with the families and we are committed to supporting their communities as they recover. I am grateful that FEMA is already on the ground assisting with the damage assessments necessary for Federal assistance. Thank you, Chairman Correa and Ranking Member Meijer for joining Ranking Member Cammack and me for this important hearing.

I want to begin today's hearing by thanking the FEMA work force for the job that they do every day. As an agency, they have worked nonstop to help those in need. I have witnessed FEMA come to the aid of hurting Floridians, and I am tremendously grateful for their service.

I don't think that is something FEMA can help us with, but we are going to continue our meeting. Can everyone hear me OK?

Chairman CORREA. Yes, yes.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Thank you. Thank you all so much. Representative Correa, I will just pick up where I left off. Last weekend, the hostage situation in Colleyville, Texas reminded us all just how important these grant programs are in addressing terrorist attacks and how much we rely on the FEMA work force to keep our communities safe. The demand on FEMA's work force is already immense and it will only grow due to the frequency and intensity of natural disasters that are predicted to increase with climate change.

To put things into perspective, the average number of major disaster declarations issued from 1960 to 1969 were roughly 18 per year. In contrast, in 2020, FEMA responded to a record 104 major disaster declarations. In 2021, FEMA responded to 58 major disaster declarations. While FEMA has responded to disaster-assisted missions over the years, an increasing workload has contributed to work force challenges related to hiring, training, and retention.

After the record-breaking 2017 hurricanes, the Government Accountability Office found that FEMA faced challenges in training employees and maintaining staffing levels across four concurrent disasters, which hindered the Agency's response. Furthermore, in 2020, more FEMA workers transferred to other agencies than in any other year over the past decade. This mass exit may be attributed to the workload. Past employees have described working 12-hour days and having little—not having enough time in between to recover between assignments.

FEMA's work force is suffering from an increase in burnout and it is crucial that FEMA address these concerns and prioritize its work force and their needs.

Additionally, I am worried about the agency's lack of diversity especially within its leadership roles. Only 24 percent of FEMA's senior executive service employees identified as minorities, and 31 percent identified as female. Having a diverse work force, as we all know, is critical to providing equitable and comprehensive disaster assistance.

I am glad to see the Biden administration invest in FEMA's work force and for release of the 2022 to 2026 FEMA Strategic Plan that establishes three overarching goals for the next 5 years, improving equity in emergency management, leading the field in climate resilience, and ensuring FEMA is ready to respond to the many tasks the agency is assigned.

It is with sincere gratitude that I welcome our witnesses here today. I look forward to hearing your perspectives on FEMA's work force and what Congress can do to better support them moving forward. The Ranking Member has joined us. The Chair will now recognize the Ranking Member from the Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Subcommittee, the gentlewoman from Florida, Mrs. Cammack, for an opening statement.

[The statement of Chairwoman Demings follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRWOMAN VAL DEMINGS

JANUARY 20, 2022

We are here to discuss the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) workforce. This topic is incredibly timely, given the tornadoes that struck southwest Florida Sunday morning, destroying dozens of homes and leaving thousands without

power in Lee and Charlotte Counties. I offer my deepest sympathies for the Floridians who were impacted and am committed to supporting their communities as they recover. I am grateful that FEMA is already on the ground, assisting with the damage assessments necessary for Federal assistance.

Thank you, Chairman Correa and Ranking Member Meijer for joining Ranking Member Cammack and me for this important hearing. I want to begin today's hearing by thanking the FEMA workforce for the job they do every day. As an agency, they have worked nonstop to help those in need. I have witnessed FEMA come to the aid of hurting Floridians and I am tremendously grateful for their service. Over the years, FEMA has responded to disasters, including multiple, simultaneous large-scale disasters, and supported other Federal agencies with their missions. Notably, FEMA continues to carry out critical parts of the Federal response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

FEMA's workforce plays a crucial role in protecting our communities from terrorism through the administration of the Department of Homeland Security Preparedness Grants, which includes funding for the Nonprofit Security Grant Program. Last weekend, the hostage situation in Colleyville, Texas reminded us of just how important these grant programs are in addressing terrorist attacks and how much we rely on the FEMA workforce to keep our communities safe.

The demand on FEMA's workforce is already immense, and it will only grow due to the frequency and intensity of natural disasters that are predicted to increase with climate change. To put things into perspective, the average number of major disaster declarations issued from 1960 to 1969 was roughly 18 per year. In contrast, in 2020, FEMA responded to a record 104 major disaster declarations and in 2021, FEMA responded to 58 major disaster declarations.

While FEMA has responded to disaster assistance missions over the years, an increasing workload has contributed to workforce challenges related to hiring, training, and retention. After the record-breaking 2017 hurricanes, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that FEMA faced challenges in training employees and maintaining staffing levels across 4 concurrent disasters, which hindered the agency's response. Furthermore, in 2020, more FEMA workers transferred to other agencies than in any other year over the past decade. This mass exit may be attributed to the workload; past employees have described working 12-hour days and not having enough time to recover between assignments. FEMA's workforce is suffering from an increase in burnout, and it is crucial that FEMA address these concerns and prioritize its workforce and their needs.

Additionally, I am worried about the agency's lack of diversity especially within its leadership roles. Only 24 percent of FEMA's Senior Executive Service employees identified as minorities and 31 percent identified as female. Having a diverse workforce is critical to providing equitable and comprehensive disaster assistance. I commend the Biden administration for investing in FEMA's workforce and for releasing the 2022-2026 FEMA Strategic Plan which establishes 3 overarching goals for the next 5 years: Improving equity in emergency management, leading the field of climate resilience, and ensuring FEMA is ready to respond to the many tasks the agency is assigned.

It is with sincere gratitude that I welcome our witnesses here today. I look forward to hearing your perspectives on FEMA's workforce and what Congress can do to better support them moving forward.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Well, thank you, Chairwoman Demings and Chairman Correa for holding this important hearing today. There is a saying in the business world, a company is only as good as its employees. This can apply most places and it certainly applies to FEMA, whose vital mission is help people before, during, and after disasters. Now, when people think of FEMA, images are conjured of flooding, hurricanes, tornadoes, the devastation of an entire town like we sadly witnessed in southwest Kentucky.

However, in recent years, FEMA's mission sets have grown. In March 2020, when President Trump declared a Nation-wide emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic, FEMA took a lead role in our Nation's response. In March 2021, FEMA was tasked with providing operational support to the Department of Health and Human Services with unaccompanied children crossing the border.

Most recently in August and September of last year, FEMA assisted in the Afghan refugee resettlement efforts.

Now, while FEMA employees are incredibly capable and resilient, I am concerned that these multiple mission sets are exhausting the work force. This sentiment was echoed during FEMA Administrator Criswell's first all-hands meeting where she identified employee burnout as a major issue. According to FEMA's 2021 Preparedness Report, "When multiple large-scale incidents require simultaneous support . . . State and Federal capability may be strained, reducing capacity to on-going recovery efforts and to respond to additional incidents." The report states that there are, "More disaster declarations open at the end of 2020 than at any other point since 1953, when data collection began."

Now, currently, the agency is responding to 77 Presidentially-declared disasters.

While employee fatigue poses extraordinary challenges at FEMA, a recent report by the GAO highlighted that, "Disaster personnel experienced significant limitations with qualification status matching performance in the field." Meaning that staff members who were qualified in FEMA's qualification system, the system that tracks the training and performance requirements for disaster work force positions, did not have the skills or experience to effectively perform their positions in the field. The GAO additionally found that FEMA's disaster work force "encountered challenges related to the availability of courses, providing and receiving on the job training and mentoring, and consistently receiving performance evaluations."

Now, these major shortcomings hinder staff development necessary to increasing the skills and competencies needed during these critical deployments. The GAO made three recommendations to FEMA including developing a plan to address the challenges that have hindered FEMA's ability to provide reliable and complete information to field leaders and managers about staff knowledge, skills, and abilities, (2) develop mechanisms to assess how effectively FEMA's disaster work force was deployed to meet mission needs in the field, and (3) create a staff development program for FEMA's disaster work force.

Further, due to allegations of misconduct at the agency in 2019, FEMA requested a study be conducted on harassment and discrimination in the FEMA workplace. The RAND Corporation managed a survey to, "Designed to estimate the annual prevalence of workplace harassment and discrimination at FEMA and to assess employee perceptions of leadership and work force climate." Of the personnel that completed the survey, about 29 percent of employees experienced sex-, race-, or ethnicity-based discrimination. As a result of the study, FEMA published their culture improvement action plan designed to increase employee awareness of the RAND survey results, provide transparent communication of work force culture objectives, programs, and improvement, and associated implementation time lines.

It is my understanding that RAND has conducted a second survey. I look forward to learning of those results and hope that the agency culture has improved.

With all the aforementioned challenges, employee fatigue, barriers to training, lacking necessary skills in the field, and prevalence of harassment and discrimination in the workplace, is the FEMA work force prepared and well-positioned to respond to the disasters when needed? I certainly hope so. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today on their perspectives on these challenges and what steps the agency should take to move forward in a positive way.

Now, before I yield back, I do want to take a moment to thank all of our incredible hard-working dedicated men and women at FEMA. You guys have a tough job. We are so grateful for the extraordinary work that you do. I don't believe that you all are recognized or thanked enough. So, with that, I would like to yield back to Chairwoman Demings. Thank you so much and I look forward to the testimony here today.

[The statement of Ranking Member Cammack follows:]

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER KAT CAMMACK

Thank you, Chairwoman Demings and Chairman Correa for holding this important hearing today.

There's a saying in the business world, "a company is only as good as its employees." This can apply most places and certainly applies to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), whose vital mission is to help people before, during, and after disasters.

When people think of FEMA, images are conjured of flooding, hurricanes, or the devastation of an entire town, like we sadly recently witnessed in southwest Kentucky. However, in recent years, FEMA's mission sets have grown.

In March 2020, when President Trump declared a Nation-wide emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic, FEMA took a lead role in our Nation's response. In March 2021, FEMA was tasked with providing operational support to the Department of Health and Human Services with unaccompanied children crossing the border. Most recently, in August/September of last year, FEMA assisted in the Afghan refugee resettlement efforts.

While FEMA employees are incredibly capable and resilient, I am concerned that these multiple mission sets are exhausting the workforce. This sentiment was echoed during FEMA Administrator Criswell's first all-hands meeting where she identified employee burn-out as a major issue.

According to FEMA's 2021 Preparedness Report, "When multiple large-scale incidents require simultaneous support . . . State and Federal capability may be strained, reducing capacity to on-going recovery efforts and to respond to additional incidents." The report states that "there were more disaster declarations open at the end of 2020 than at any other point since 1953, when data collection began." Currently, the agency is responding to 77 Presidentially-declared disasters.

While employee fatigue poses extraordinary challenges at FEMA, a recent report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) highlighted that "disaster personnel experienced significant limitations with qualification status matching performance in the field." Meaning that staff members who were qualified in the FEMA Qualification System, the system that tracks training and performance requirements for disaster workforce positions, did not have the skills or experience to effectively perform their positions in the field. The GAO additionally found that FEMA's disaster workforce "encountered challenges related to the availability of courses, providing and receiving on-the-job training and mentoring, and consistently receiving performance evaluations." These major shortcomings hindered staff development necessary to increasing the skills and competencies needed during deployments.

The GAO made three recommendations to FEMA including: Develop a plan to address the challenges that have hindered FEMA's ability to provide reliable and complete information to field leaders and managers about staff knowledge, skills, and abilities; develop mechanisms to assess how effectively FEMA's disaster workforce was deployed to meet mission needs in the field; and create a staff development program for FEMA's disaster workforce.

Further, due to allegations of misconduct at the agency, in 2019, FEMA requested a study be conducted on harassment and discrimination in the FEMA workplace. The RAND Corporation managed a survey "designed to estimate the annual preva-

lence of workplace harassment and discrimination at FEMA and to assess employee perceptions of leadership and workplace climate.”

Of the personnel that completed the survey, about 29 percent of employees experienced sex-, race-, or ethnicity-based discrimination. As a result of the study, FEMA published their “Culture Improvement Action Plan” designed to increase employee awareness of RAND survey results; Provide transparent communication of workforce culture objectives, programs, and improvements and associated implementation time lines; and, Demonstrate continued leadership commitment to FEMA core values.

It is my understanding that RAND has conducted a second survey. I look forward to learning of those results and hope that culture at the agency has improved.

With all these aforementioned challenges—employee fatigue, barriers to training, lacking necessary skills in the field, and the prevalence of harassment and discrimination in the workplace—is the FEMA workforce prepared and well-positioned to respond to disasters when needed?

I certainly hope so, and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today on their perspectives on these challenges, and what steps should the agency take to move forward positively.

Before I yield back, I do want to take a moment to thank all the incredible, hard-working, and dedicated men and women at FEMA. We are so grateful for the extraordinary work that you do, and I don’t believe you all are thanked enough.

With that, thank you Chairwoman Demings, and I yield back.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. I thank the Ranking Member and I know my video feed cut out earlier but one part, a very important part of this hearing is to acknowledge the amazing job. I hope that at least that part got through to acknowledge the amazing job that the men and women of FEMA do every day and we are so appreciative for their service.

The Chair now recognizes the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight Management and Accountability, the gentleman from the California, Mr. Correa, for an opening statement.

Chairman CORREA. Thank you, Madam Chair, and I join you, Chairwoman Demings and Ranking Member Cammack, in also thanking FEMA for the good work you do for Americans and for others all over the world. Again, Chairwoman Demings, thank you for holding this hearing as well as my Ranking Member Meijer and myself. Again, we are here to support FEMA’s mission and are essentially the backbone of the agency. From the field operation teams and Reservists who deploy to disaster sites within hours of emergency declaration, to those who work behind the scenes who administer grant funding and organize countless logistical efforts.

The FEMA work force is varied as a taskforce agency can be. In the last few years, FEMA has had to juggle on-going Federal responses, numerous record-breaking disasters, COVID-19, and resettlement of refugees around the world. That doesn’t capture all of what FEMA has been doing in the last few years. It is a testament to the skill and flexibility of FEMA’s work force that the agency is able to support the Federal Government’s efforts in so many different ways in so many different areas. Yet it can’t be said that the FEMA employees haven’t felt the strain of being pulled in so many directions. Your work force, their work force, is suffering from an increase in burn-out in recent years. Also, employees have left the agency in a higher number than usual.

It is important that FEMA address these rising attrition rates and prioritize. FEMA has failed to properly prioritize work force management issues like recruitment, retention, and the agency has struggled to deal with issues of harassment and discrimination within your work force. But in recent years, FEMA has taken sig-

nificant and concrete steps to foster a more inclusive and resilient work force. With the support of Congress in 2019, FEMA created an Office of Professional Responsibility to better investigate allegations of employee misconduct. Under the Biden administration, FEMA has renewed a focus in addressing long-term work force challenges by increasing the availability and quality of training and educational opportunities for the emergency management community. Providing opportunities for advancement and the development of new skills is important to retaining the agency's skilled work force. Yet, we have much, much work to be done.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about what they would like to see FEMA do and demonstrate an on-going commitment to supporting its employees, as well as how we in Congress can assist you in this effort. It is not your job. It is not our job. It is the job of all of us collectively working together. We can all too easily get caught up in the immediacy of responding to the next big hurricane, wildfire, or tornado. But without doing the consistent and meaningful work to listen and respond to the needs of FEMA on a continuous basis, the agency puts in jeopardy its ability to effectively carry out its mission. I look forward to taking time today to examine these issues, to celebrate the accomplishments of your tremendous work force, and to look ahead at the next step FEMA must take to support its fine people. With that, I thank you again for joining us today. Madam Chair, I yield.

[The statement of Chairman Correa follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN J. LUIS CORREA

JANUARY 20, 2022

We're here this morning to discuss the FEMA workforce. The men and women who work to support FEMA's mission are the backbone of the agency. From the field operations teams and Reservists who deploy to disaster sites within hours of an emergency declaration, to those who work behind the scenes to administer grant funding and organize countless logistics. The FEMA workforce is as varied as the tasks the agency is asked to carry out.

During the last few years, FEMA has had to juggle the on-going Federal response to numerous record-breaking disasters, in addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the resettlement of our Afghan allies. That doesn't capture all of FEMA's duties. It is a testament to the skill and flexibility of FEMA's workforce that the agency is able to support the Federal Government's efforts in so many different areas. Yet it cannot be said that FEMA employees haven't felt the strain of being pulled in so many directions. The workforce is suffering from an increase in burn-out and in recent years significantly more employees have left the agency than usual. It is absolutely critical that FEMA address these rising attrition rates, and prioritize the needs of its people.

In the past, FEMA has failed to properly prioritize workforce management issues like recruitment and retention and the agency has struggled to deal with issues of harassment and discrimination within the workplace. But in recent years FEMA has taken significant and concrete steps to foster a more inclusive and resilient workforce. With the support of Congress, in 2019, FEMA created an Office of Professional Responsibility to better investigate allegations of employee misconduct. Under the Biden administration, FEMA has a renewed focus on addressing long-term workforce challenges by increasing the availability and quality of training and educational opportunities for the emergency management community. Providing opportunities for advancement and the development of new skills is important for retaining the agency's skilled workforce. Yet there is still more to be done.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about what they would like to see FEMA do to demonstrate an on-going commitment to supporting its employees. As well as how we in Congress can assist this effort. It can be all too easy to get caught up in the immediacy of responding to the next big hurricane, wildfire, or tornado. But without doing the consistent and meaningful work to listen and respond to the

needs of the FEMA community on a continuous basis, the agency puts in jeopardy its ability to effectively carry out its mission.

I look forward to taking the time today to examine this issue, to celebrate the accomplishments of this workforce, and to look ahead at the next steps FEMA must take to support its people.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Thank you so much, Mr. Correa, for that statement and for yielding back. The Chair now recognizes the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Oversight, Management, and Accountability, the gentleman from Michigan, Mr. Meijer, for an opening statement.

Mr. MEIJER. Thank you, Chairwoman Demings and Ranking Member Cammack and Chairman Correa for holding this hearing today, the first for both subcommittees in 2022. Thank you to our witnesses for giving us their time and insights into this critical and timely topic.

I certainly appreciate the work that GAO and RAND have done to improve FEMA's functions and the focus of today's hearing, how we can help build that work force which is ready to respond, and help FEMA fulfill its mission of helping people before, during, and after disasters. We will hear about the issues FEMA's work force has faced in the past and how FEMA has worked to resolve those problems. But most importantly, I hope we will hear how FEMA can help set itself up for success in the future.

Before we begin, I would like to express as both the Chairwoman and Chairman Correa have said and also Ranking Member Cammack has said, express my sincere gratitude to the brave men and woman working tirelessly at FEMA who have barely had a break since the historic hurricane season of 2017. Just last week, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration stated that the United States has experienced \$750 billion in damages from weather-related disasters just in the last 5 years. Moreover, in 2020 and in 2021, the United States suffered from at least 20 individual disasters costing more than \$1 billion each. The magnitude of those numbers is overwhelming and certainly speaks to the pressure that FEMA has been under.

What is truly concerning is that the weather disasters are only a portion of what FEMA has been dealing with in the past several years. FEMA has also been at the forefront of the COVID-19 pandemic response for almost 2 years now. For the first time in history, FEMA is managing a disaster declaration in every State and territory in the Nation, as well as the District of Columbia. FEMA has been tasked with assisting in the coordination of the resettlement of Afghan allies through Operation Allies Welcome, as well as assisting in the border crisis on our Southern Border. The mission at FEMA seems to expand every few months and I can only imagine the stress and strain that this has put on the work force.

So, again, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks and appreciation to the staff at FEMA for all the good work that they do day in and day out. Because when they are called into action, it is because the event is so catastrophic that local and State resources are overwhelmed. They are the last line of defense in recovery. America deserves and needs a strong FEMA, one that can fulfill its mission every time it is called upon because the American people expect this. As Members of Congress, we should also expect a well-managed organization that can fulfill its mission.

Several studies have made recommendations over the years on how FEMA should recruit, train, and manage this work force. I know we will hear about some of those today, as well as from Mr. Fugate, a former FEMA administrator who has first-hand knowledge about managing the FEMA work force. Some recent GAO recommendations have been made to address these work force challenges, including that the FEMA administrator should develop a plan to address identified challenges, develop mechanisms, including collecting relevant data, and create a staff development program for FEMA's work force. FEMA has agreed to implement—are working to implement these recommendations and concurs with the conclusion. I hope that at a future date, we will be able to hear directly from FEMA on this matter. I also look forward to RAND's input on the survey they did with FEMA to estimate the prevalence of workplace harassment and discrimination in order to strengthen the core of the employment base.

I am encouraged by FEMA's willingness to be open-minded and listen to outside groups about ways to reduce harassment and discrimination while also strengthening its work force both in terms of its mission and its internal culture. Because, again, FEMA plays a critical role in helping our citizens and communities prepare for and respond to disasters of all kinds. A strong work force is essential to carrying out this mission. I know we will do everything that we can to ensure that FEMA's work force is strong, equipped, and ready. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses. With that, I yield back.

[The statement of Ranking Member Meijer follows:]

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER PETER MELJER

Chairwoman Demings, Ranking Member Cammack, Chairman Correa, thank you for holding this joint hearing today, the first for both subcommittees in 2022.

And thank you to our witnesses for giving us their time and insights into this critical and timely topic—I certainly appreciate the work that GAO and RAND have done to improve FEMA's functions.

The focus of today's hearing is on how FEMA can build a work force that is ready to respond and help FEMA fulfill its mission of Helping People Before, During, and After Disasters.

We will hear about the issues FEMA's workforce has faced in the past, and how FEMA has worked to resolve those problems. Most importantly, I hope we will hear how FEMA can set itself up for success in the future.

However, before we begin, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the men and women working tirelessly at FEMA, who have barely had a break since the historic hurricane season of 2017.

Just last week, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association stated that the United States has experienced \$750 billion in damages from weather-related disasters in the last 5 years alone. Moreover, both in 2020 and 2021, the United States suffered from at least 20 individual disasters that cost more than \$1 billion each.

The magnitude of those numbers is overwhelming and certainly speaks to the pressure that FEMA has been under. What is truly concerning is that weather disasters are only a portion of what FEMA has been dealing with over the last several years.

FEMA has also been at the forefront of the COVID-19 pandemic for almost 2 years. For the first time in history, FEMA is managing a disaster declaration in every State and territory in the Nation, as well as the District of Columbia. FEMA has also been tasked with assisting in the coordination of the Afghan resettlement through Operation Allies Welcome, as well as assisting in the border crisis.

The mission at FEMA seems to expand every few months, and I am sure that this stress and strain has taken its toll on the workforce.

So, again, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks and appreciation to the staff at FEMA for all the good work they do day in and day out.

FEMA is called into action when an event is so catastrophic, that local and State resources are overwhelmed. They are the last line of defense and recovery. America deserves a strong FEMA—one that can fulfill its mission every time it is called upon. Americans expect this, and as Members of Congress, we should also expect a well-managed organization that can fulfill its mission.

Several studies have made recommendations over the years about how FEMA should recruit, train, and manage its workforce. We will hear about some of those today, as well as from Mr. Fugate, a former FEMA administrator, who has firsthand knowledge about managing the FEMA workforce.

Some recent GAO recommendations have been made to address work force challenges, including that the FEMA administrator should:

- Develop a plan to address identified challenges that have hindered FEMA's ability to provide reliable information to field officials about staff skills and abilities;

- Develop mechanisms, including collecting relevant data, to assess how effectively FEMA's disaster workforce was deployed to meet mission needs in the field; and

- Create a staff development program for FEMA's disaster workforce that addresses training access, delivery of on-the-job training, and other development methods.

FEMA has agreed with these recommendations and is working to implement them.

I hope that at a future date we will be able to hear directly from FEMA on this matter.

We will also hear from RAND about a survey they did on behalf of FEMA designed to estimate the prevalence of workplace harassment and discrimination at the agency. This survey certainly had some eye-opening results, and I appreciate the opportunity to get more details on those findings here today.

In response to this survey, FEMA developed a Culture Action Improvement Plan, and in the past several years, established an Office of Professional Responsibility and made anti-sexual harassment training mandatory across the agency.

I am encouraged by FEMA's willingness to be open-minded and listen to outside groups about ways to reduce harassment and discrimination while also strengthening its workforce—both in terms of its mission and its internal culture.

FEMA plays a critical role in helping our citizens and communities prepare for and respond to disasters of all kinds, and a strong workforce is essential to be able to do just that. I pledge to do everything I can from this seat to ensure that FEMA's workforce is strong, equipped with the tools it needs, and ready to help people before, during, and after disasters.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses, and I yield back.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. The Chair thanks the Ranking Member for his statement. Members are reminded that the committees will operate according to the guidelines laid out by the Chairman and Ranking Member in their February 3 colloquy regarding remote procedures. Without objection, Members not on the subcommittees shall be permitted to sit and question the witnesses. Additional Member statements may be included in the record.

[The statement of Chairman Thompson follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BENNIE G. THOMPSON

JANUARY 20, 2022

I would like to thank the FEMA workforce for their service to the country. In my home State of Mississippi, we have a lot of experience with disasters, unfortunately, and know the value of having a strong FEMA workforce.

FEMA has continued to help communities respond to and recover from natural disasters. Meanwhile, it has carried out critical parts of the Federal response to the COVID-19 pandemic and supported other Federal agencies in the care of unaccompanied children at the border and the resettlement of Afghan allies. FEMA has been challenged with responding to multiple large-scale disasters while simultaneously being pulled into other important missions. This workload has hindered efforts to address workforce challenges, including hiring, training, and retention.

The frequency and intensity of natural disasters due to climate change have only exacerbated these workforce challenges. In 2017, we saw the direct impact of a FEMA workforce that was understaffed, undertrained, and overwhelmed when three

major storms made landfall in the span of less than a month. We need a robust FEMA workforce that is prepared to handle our new reality, which includes extreme weather events, pandemics, and other evolving threats.

My concern about FEMA's workforce strength is not new. In 2019, then-FEMA Administrator Peter Gaynor testified before this committee that the FEMA workforce had a staffing deficit of a "few thousand." However, I regularly hear from constituents that they do not receive a response from FEMA when they apply for a job. There appears to be a disconnect. The agency has also struggled with issues of harassment and discrimination within the workplace, which is undoubtedly undermines efforts to build a strong workforce.

Additionally, I continue to be concerned about the agency's lack of diversity, particularly in leadership roles. The workforce should be diverse and represent the country in order to provide, equitable, and comprehensive disaster assistance. For these reasons, I am glad the Biden administration demonstrated early on that strengthening the FEMA workforce would be a priority. The President's fiscal year 2022 budget request focuses on filling critical gaps in the agency's overall staffing, with a particular emphasis on strengthening the incident management workforce.

Moreover, FEMA's 2022–2026 Strategic Plan names building a diverse and stronger workforce within FEMA as key objectives. The plan further seeks to improve equity and increase the availability and quality of training and educational opportunities for the emergency management workforce. These are promising steps by the Biden administration, but more work needs to be done.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about the challenges FEMA faces and what Congress can do to aid them in making FEMA's workforce stronger.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. I now welcome our panel of witnesses. Our first witness is former FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate. Mr. Fugate served as FEMA administrator throughout the Obama administration. During his tenure, he led FEMA through multiple record-breaking disaster years and oversaw the Federal Government's response to multiple natural disasters, including devastating tornadoes in the Midwest and Hurricanes Irene, Matthew, and Sandy, among others. Prior to his time in the Obama administration, Mr. Fugate was the director of Florida's Division of Emergency Management. During his time in Florida, he launched the largest mutual aid response to affected States in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. It is great to see you and thank you for joining us today.

Our second witness is Chris Currie, the director of GAO's Homeland Security and Justice team. Mr. Currie leads GAO's work on emergency management disaster response and recovery and Department of Homeland Security management in high-risk issues. Mr. Currie began his tenure with GAO in 2002. It is great to see you and welcome.

Our third and final witness is Carra Sims, a senior behavioral and social scientist at the RAND Corporation. Ms. Sims' current and past research includes investigating the effects of workplace stressors on job attitudes and performance, exploring the effects of organizational climate and culture on job attitudes and behavior, and how best to change organizational climate and culture and determining the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for success in various military and civilian jobs. Welcome, Ms. Sims, and thank you so much for joining us today.

Without objection, the witnesses' full statements will be inserted in the record. I now ask each witness to summarize their statement for 5 minutes, beginning with former Administrator Fugate.

**STATEMENT OF W. CRAIG FUGATE, FORMER ADMINISTRATOR,
FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY**

Mr. FUGATE. Well, thank you, Chair and the Ranking Member, and the other Chair and Ranking Members. First of all, I would like to acknowledge the fact of the thanks you gave FEMA because I remember not too long ago in the distant past where FEMA wasn't held in high regard. The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina was a stain for the agency. As much as we are talking about the challenges FEMA is facing, I also would like to acknowledge how far FEMA has come from that response and the improvements they have made. A lot of it with the support of Congress.

You asked an important question. What can Congress do to help FEMA develop and professionalize and continue to grow the work force? I want to address a couple of key issues because I think it is easy to state the problems. Quite honestly, a lot of what is being discussed is process. It will not change the outcome. You can do all the studies, gather all the data, do all the reviews, and it still won't change the fundamental process that FEMA depends upon a work force that is not what many people think it is. We use the term reserves. But FEMA employees that are hired as Reservists, are considered intermittent employees. They are only employed when there is a disaster. They have no benefits when they are not and they are on call.

Now, think about the current work force that we are facing in the Nation with job shortages. How do you attract qualified people, train them, have them sit waiting in case there is a disaster, then deploy them and expect to have that kind of output with no other benefits or retentions outside of their initial training. Now, again, FEMA has a lot of disasters. Some folks are called up are a routinely deployed for long periods of time. But other more specialized skills are only deployed rarely. There is also the tendency to go to the same people over and over again because they have more experience. Newer people hired don't get the training, don't have the experience, and don't always get called up.

So, the first thing I would ask Congress to look at is how do you maintain a work force? This is the majority of the folks that deploy in disasters are the Reservists that do the bulk of the work in recovery. How do you maintain on-call qualified trained staff that are only engaged when you deploy them to a disaster and have no other benefits? Even in the military, and again, we use the term Reservists, these are not the same type of benefits the Reservists have in the U.S. military where they are covered under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Act, where if people have jobs and get called up for military duty, those jobs are protected. That doesn't even apply to FEMA Reservists. Reservists have a known deployment of every month they have drill. They get reimbursed for that. They have 2 weeks' annual training. Again, subject to any call-ups for the Federal mission, protection for deployment. FEMA Reservists get none of that.

So, I think the first thing we want to look at is can we give FEMA more tools in recruiting and retaining qualified Reservists that many of which only are going to deploy in certain times of disasters and certain skill sets and address, how do you incentivize people who would be available? Also, understand that some of

these folks work full-time. They can't wait for a disaster. But they may have skills that are required by FEMA as their way to provide tools there.

So, again, I would look at Reservists. Think about this. These are literally up to thousands to tens of thousands of people that we are deploying across this Nation. They are on-call. They are totally subject to FEMA's needs. They are not incentivized when they are not deployed. They really don't get any benefits outside of when they are deployed. That model doesn't scale up to the frequency of disasters, nor does it work very good when the economy is strong because of the shortfall points.

The second thing I would look at is the work that they are doing. Much has been made—and I think you will hear this across the board, is a concern that will be FEMA be able to respond to the next disaster? I can tell you the answer. The answer is yes, they will respond. That has not been the issue. The issue has been having to take people off of previous disasters where recovery work can take years, if not a decade, and move them to the new disaster. Stopping or slowing down the recovery from the previous disasters. I ask this question and I have had conversations with my counterparts at GAO and others, is our reimbursement process and rebuilding process takes literally, in New Orleans, we are still doing recovery from Katrina. I was still doing recovery when I left FEMA at Katrina. Why does it take us a decade when insurance companies are in and out in less than a year? I think we need to go back and say, instead of working always on the work force, we need to work on the process of how do we speed up the process of reimbursing communities? This may not be a shock to you, but too often decisions on how to process disasters are made based upon what I hear in a lot of hearings we start out with to avoid fraud, waste, and abuse, becoming the overriding decision maker that nobody wants to take a risk of an adverse finding in a IG report or a GAO report. So, we have such a high requirement that we have built processes to minimize that at the expense of helping communities recover quickly and requiring a work force that is extremely large.

Think about it. I will almost guarantee the tornado outbreaks we saw earlier around Christmas in Kentucky and the other regions the insurance companies will be done within a year. FEMA will be there for the next 5 years. Why? If we don't fix the process, you are always going to need a lot more people to administer this. So, two ways to check this is give them better benefits to recruit them and look at how do we reduce the process so it takes fewer people to be successful in helping communities recover faster. Get the money there in the first year of recovery, not 5 years later while we are still trying to make sure the answer is perfect. Thank you Madam Chair and Ranking Member.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Fugate follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF W. CRAIG FUGATE

THURSDAY, JANUARY 20, 2022

Chair Val Demings, Ranking Member Kat Cammack, and Members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today about FEMA, Building a Workforce Prepared and Ready to Respond.

First, I want to celebrate the fact that FEMA's workforce has continued to respond to COVID-19, as well as hurricanes, floods, fires, and severe weather outbreaks, while administering its authorized and appropriated funded programs from Congress. Much has been done through remote work which has allowed FEMA to continue its mission during this pandemic.

While others will talk about the challenges that FEMA faces in building and maintaining its workforce, I want to focus on possible solutions.

FEMA is authorized major three classifications of workforce:

FEMA Permanent Full Time (PFT) employees are hired through a competitive process that includes an application and interview. They may gain competitive status after 1 year of continuous service and full career tenure after 3 years of continuous service.

Cadre of On-Call Response/Recovery Employees (CORE)—are hired to work for a specific, limited period, between 2 to 4 years. These positions may be renewed if there is on-going disaster work and funding is available. CORE employees are generally eligible for the same benefits as PFT employees, but do not gain competitive status nor career tenure during their term.

Reservists (On-Call)—FEMA consistently seeks talented and hard-working people who are eager to assist disaster survivors and first responders on an on-call basis as Reservist employees. They are the main FEMA workforce during an emergency or disaster.

While there are other classifications such as FEMA Corps, Internships, most of the workforce resides in the above three classifications.

Additionally, to augment the disaster workforce, the Department of Homeland Security maintains a Surge Capacity Force (SCF) and FEMA continues to recruit, roster, orient, and deploy SCF members as necessary.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Better Utilization of the Permanent Full Time (PFT) Workforce in Disaster Response

- All PFT Workforce members should be trained in an emergency role in addition to their full-time role.
- PFT members should be allowed to deploy to disasters as part of a rotational system to ensure daily operational needs of FEMA are met.
- FEMA should continue to utilize the PFT as a surge workforce during major event.

Background

Many of the PTF workforce join FEMA to help in disasters but are rarely deployed. Most disasters are managed by the CORE and Reservists workforce. But during major events like Hurricane Katrina, Super Storm Sandy, the hurricanes of 2017, and most recently the Federal response to COVID-19, it was required that the PFT workforce deploy to support emergency operations. Ensuring the PFT workforce is prepared and trained to emergency operations is key to provide a rapid surge workforce. There are three main activities that the PFT workforce are expected to perform during these major events.

1. Deployed to the disaster to support emergency operations
2. Staff the National Response Coordination Center (RCC) or Regional RCCs
3. Backfill for deployed staff to continue continuing of operations for time-sensitive functions.

My experience during Super Storm Sandy was that many of the those deployed for the first time came back with new appreciation for how their jobs supported the FEMA mission.

When I became FEMA administrator in 2009, not every FEMA permanent full-time employee had emergency duties in their position descriptions even as this requirement was in the job postings. When I inquired about this, I was informed that not all employees were expected to be deployable in a disaster. We made a change that all new hires would complete a signing statement acknowledging that they would be expected to have an emergency function in addition to their full-time job. The current statement on U.S.A. Jobs is as follows:

“EMERGENCY ASSIGNMENT: Every FEMA employee has regular and recurring emergency management responsibilities, though not every position requires routine deployment to disaster sites. All positions are subject to recall around the clock for emergency management operations, which may require irregular work hours, work at locations other than the official duty station, and may include duties other than those specified in the employee's official position description. Travel requirements in support of emergency operations may be extensive in nature (weeks to months),

with little advance notice, and may require employees to relocate to emergency sites with physically austere and operationally challenging conditions.”

The Disaster Staffing Support Program (DSSP) is comprised of FEMA HQ FTE staff who do not typically deploy.

This internal, surge workforce is made up of PFTs and COREs across the FEMA HQ who currently hold Ancillary Support, Unassigned, or Mission Essential designations.

Improve Benefits and Retention of the Reservist Workforce

1. Provide all Reservist with a minimum of 2 days a month and 2 weeks a year of paid training if not deployed in that fiscal year for at least 30 days.
2. Consider adding the FEMA Reservist workforce to the Uniformed Services Employment and Re-Employment Rights Act or provide similar protections under the Stafford Act.
3. Continue to improve the implementation of Disaster Reform and Recovery Act (DRRA) where CORE and Reservists can compete for PFT positions at FEMA under Merit Promotion after 3 or more years of continuous work.

Background

Reservist at FEMA are not the equivalent of the military Reservist who are covered under the Uniformed Services Employment and Re-Employment Rights Act. Rather FEMA Reservist are considered on-call who work intermittently with little benefits when not deployed. They have no protections if they have full-time employment when called up.

Hiring and maintaining FEMA Reservists is a continuous process. As the work is on-call, and intermittent, attracting talent in tight job markets is a challenge. Without incentives to recruit and maintain Reservists, this workforce will continue to be a staffing challenge for current and future disasters.

Hiring Under the Disaster Reform and Recovery Act (DRRA)

Before the Disaster Reform and Recovery Act, Stafford Act employees could only apply for Permanent Full-Time (PFT) positions open to the general public. Now, Stafford Act employees can compete for PFT positions at FEMA under Merit Promotion after 3 or more years of continuous work.

Reduce the Workforce Requirements to Administer Disaster Assistance Under the Stafford Act

1. Speed disaster recovery by using estimated cost rather than actual cost. Adapt Insurance Industry best practices to ensure fair payouts for eligible work in a declared disaster in months, not years.
2. Continue the Dispute Resolution Process (Arbitration) for all current and future disasters where agreement cannot be reached in recommendation 1.
3. Do not allow a mentality of zero fraud, waste, or abuse to drive process. Review how much it cost to administer \$1 in public assistance to see how this has driven up the cost, staffing requirements, and time it takes.

Background

Current staffing plans are based on the current implementation of disaster assistance under those programs available under Stafford Act Disaster Declarations.

FEMA was given new tools in the Sandy Recovery Improvement Act of 2013 to include using estimates for public assistance projects rather than actual cost.

Continue support the FEMA Administrator’s plans to address workplace harassment and discrimination.

Background

In the Spring of 2019, FEMA hired a third-party organization, RAND, to conduct an employee survey on workplace harassment and discrimination in response to an internal investigation that found disturbing evidence of misconduct within FEMA’s senior leadership ranks. The survey focused on the time frame of Spring 2018 through Spring 2019 and ultimately found numerous FEMA employees reported experiencing civil rights violations on the basis of sex, race, or ethnicity.

Female employees reported experiencing a less positive experience in the workplace than their male counterparts.

The report also identified that:

- Employees felt a gap in trust with agency senior leaders.
- Employees felt barriers to reporting civil rights violations existed.
- Employees who did report violations or misconduct felt they experienced retaliation.

- There is a lack of understanding of what constitutes sexual misconduct and appropriate behaviors.
 - Employees expressed feelings of isolation and heightened levels of vulnerability.
 - There is a perception that perpetrators are not held accountable.
 - Employees found there is inconsistency in conduct expectations.
- FEMA provided this below information as they continue to improve the agency's work climate and engagements to help implement those changes.
- Conducted Listening Sessions for FEMA Staff to share concerns on RAND report findings and next steps.
 - Developed central "landing page" on the FEMA intranet to serve as a one-stop shop for employee resources regarding culture improvement.
 - Developed and implemented Standards of Conduct for all employees.
 - Addressed Agency culture during new employee on-boarding regarding FEMA's core values and our commitment to a workplace free of harassment and discrimination. In addition, the agency is updating the exit interview process to better identify issues raised by employees moving on to different opportunities.
 - Required anti-harassment training for all employees.
 - Reporting disciplinary actions in the FEMA Weekly for agency-wide situational awareness.

Field Operations Training.—FEMA is partnering with RAINN (Rape Abuse Incest National Network), the largest anti-sexual assault organization in the country.

- Since early 2020, RAINN initiative trainings have occurred at 14 Joint Field Offices (JFOs) with a total of 2,000 participants and will include additional JFOs going forward.
- FEMA's goals, through the RAINN trainings are to:
 - Raise awareness of sexual misconduct within selected JFOs.
 - Provide JFO staff with tools to better prevent and respond to sexual misconduct.
 - Align community members within selected JFOs on next steps toward safer environments.
 - Create a culture of accountability and preparedness when it comes to sexual misconduct.
 - Execute a proactive approach to addressing sexual misconduct.
 - Implement sustainable change across the organization.
- Through March 2022, future trainings will occur at 6 additional JFOs and all trainings will be held virtually in fiscal year 2021, with tentative options to deliver trainings in-person in fiscal year 2022 pending COVID-19 restrictions.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Mr. Fugate, I am sorry. I am so sorry to have to interrupt you, but your time has expired. We have gone a little bit well over. I would ask that during one of the questions, if there is additional information that you would please present it at that time because you have such a great perspective.

I do also need to remind Members that votes have been called. I know that Members have been leaving. We are going to continue through. So, if you have not voted yet, please go ahead and vote and we are going to continue with the hearing. Thank you so much for your indulgence. I now recognize Mr. Currie to summarize his statement for 5 minutes. Mr. Currie.

STATEMENT OF CHRISTOPHER P. CURRIE, DIRECTOR, HOMELAND SECURITY AND JUSTICE TEAM, U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

Mr. CURRIE. Thank you very much, Chairwoman Demings and Chairman Correa and Ranking Members Cammack and Meijer. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss our work on FEMA's work force over the years. I would also like to say that I have a deep respect for the men and women at FEMA. I have worked with them for many years. They work long hours, thankless jobs. They are away from home long periods of time. Also, many of them are also veterans and have joined FEMA to continue their service to the country.

So, the findings of our work have nothing to do with the dedication and hard work of FEMA, but more about how the agency manages its people and how I think that could get better. I agree with Mr. Fugate, I mean, I think it is both. I think there are certainly areas within FEMA that could be improved and better managed, but I agree, we need to look at some long-term reform efforts. I am going to talk about that in a minute.

But today there has never been more pressure on the FEMA work force and they are tired now. In recent years, disasters have not just increased, but they are often sequential. There is no down time. There is no disaster season anymore. It is all year long. This requires FEMA's work force to deploy from one place to another after another. Then add to that that because of FEMA's capabilities, they have had to help with the pandemic response. Not just help but lead the response. Assist CBP at the border and help resettle Afghan refugees. So, you know, FEMA is asked to do these things because they have the resources, they have the authorities and the logistical abilities that many other Federal agencies don't have. However, they have taken on all these responsibilities with a work force structure and staffing process that hasn't transformed to keep up with this pace of what they are expected to do today.

The existing work force models were designed to scale up during a past time long ago when disasters and large disasters were rare. I will talk a little bit about our work and then I will talk about, I think, some of the things we need to do moving forward. But our work, as has been stated, has identified a number of challenges internally that I think are going to get worse if they are not addressed over time. For example, FEMA has long faced challenges in deploying staff with the right qualifications and skills to meet the disaster needs. So, this is not just us. But we talked to FEMA leaders. We talked to Federal coordinating officers, field people, people on the ground. They told us that the agency's qualifications system, which is critical deploying the right people, doesn't effectively capture staff qualifications. Often leads to unqualified or untrained people being deployed to disasters. This causes problems and I think this needs to be fixed.

We also found that FEMA struggles to train, coach, and develop its work force. Particularly, it is incident management work force, especially when deployed in the field. Field leaders told us they struggle to get the training and development necessary to be effective. For example, Reservists who make up, you know, 35 to 40 percent of FEMA's work force, they have problems accessing developmental opportunities when they are not deployed. This gets to some of the structural reforms Mr. Fugate talked about. For example, getting paid time in technology to train when they are deployed is very difficult because of the way they have to be paid through a specific disaster. So, what we recommended is that they—and this has been talked about already. They develop a more specific developmental program that addresses a lot of these challenges where we can do this outside of some of these deployments too.

The other thing I would like to mention is FEMA has hired thousands of new employees in recent years. According to the data I have seen, they have increased their total force by over 5,000 peo-

ple in the last 6 years. They now have over 22,000 staff ready to respond. Additional staff are fantastic given their increased workload, but it is not the only solution to this. They are likely to make some of these training and qualifications challenges even more difficult. For example, this means that less experienced staff are likely to be staffed to a number of these disasters. So, this is going to be something that we have to continue to address.

So, I think as I mentioned, the problem is a little bit more complicated than just tweaking internal process. I think FEMA and the Congress should consider two larger areas. Some of this is going to align with what Mr. Fugate said. First, we need to consider a broader work force reform effort involving Congress and potential legislation. New authorities may be necessary to address some of these issues. For example, the restriction on training, reserve employees, and paying for training and development when they are not actually deployed to a disaster. The way that works now is the large part of the incident management work force is being trained when they are deployed to a disaster. This is great real-life experience, but it often means that training is not going to be a priority, not surprisingly.

Second, we need to look at the process, I agree, and workload we are asking FEMA staff to perform. While, you know, most folks, I think, think of FEMA staff as immediately responding to a disaster with the blue jackets on with FEMA on the back, the truth is is that much of FEMA's work force manages grants and money and recovery efforts from prior disasters. There are many disasters that stay open for 5 to 10 years or 15 years or 16 years, in the case of Hurricane Katrina. FEMA told us last year that they were managing almost 1,000 prior disasters that were still in some stage of recovery. This means, we are still cutting checks from disasters that happened 15 years ago, as Mr. Fugate mentioned about Hurricane Katrina.

So, the bottom line is that streamlining existing programs to be more efficient would also help cut down on FEMA's workload and help them focus on the things we think they need to be focused on. This completes my statement today. I look forward to discussing how we can address the challenges and to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Currie follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF CHRISTOPHER P. CURRIE

THURSDAY, JANUARY 20, 2022

GAO HIGHLIGHTS

Highlights of GAO-22-105631, a testimony before the Subcommittees on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery and Oversight, Management, and Accountability, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives.

Why GAO Did This Study

FEMA has long been tasked with the difficult job of leading the Federal response to natural disasters. The increasing frequency of disasters and the additional responsibilities of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and other events have stretched the FEMA workforce in unprecedented ways.

This testimony discusses GAO's prior work on various FEMA workforce challenges. This statement is based on products GAO issued from July 2015 to August 2021. For those products, GAO reviewed and analyzed Federal law, Federal data, and agency documentation and interviewed Federal, State, and local officials as well as representatives of stakeholder groups impacted by disasters. GAO also conducted

some of these interviews as part of visits to locations affected by hurricanes in 2017 and 2018. Additionally, GAO conducted 17 focus groups with FEMA staff.

What GAO Recommends

GAO has made numerous recommendations in prior reports designed to address the workforce challenges discussed in this testimony. FEMA has taken steps to address these recommendations and GAO is monitoring FEMA's on-going efforts.

FEMA WORKFORCE.—LONG-STANDING AND NEW CHALLENGES COULD AFFECT MISSION SUCCESS

What GAO Found

GAO's past work has identified long-standing challenges facing the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) workforce. In May 2020, for example, GAO reported on the following workforce challenges within FEMA:

Staffing shortages.—The 2017 and 2018 disaster seasons created unprecedented demand for FEMA's workforce. FEMA deployed over 10,000 personnel during the peak of each season but faced shortages in over half of its cadres—operational or programmatic groups—when disasters began. For example, 18 of 23 cadres operated with 25 percent or less of staff available to deploy when Hurricane Maria made landfall in 2017. In addition, many employees—up to 48 percent in some cases—declined deployments due, according to FEMA officials, to burn-out and austere conditions in the field.

Workforce qualifications.—GAO found that FEMA faced challenges deploying staff with the right qualifications and skills at the right times to meet disaster needs. Qualification status in FEMA's systems was not a reliable indicator of staff's ability to perform in the field. For example, in 14 of the focus groups GAO held with FEMA staff, participants said that staff who were designated as qualified in FEMA's system did not always have the necessary skills for their position. GAO recommended that FEMA develop a plan to address challenges in providing quality information to field leaders about staff qualifications. FEMA told GAO in December 2021 that its Field Operations Directorate has created plans to inform field leadership about staff skills and abilities, among other things. GAO also recommended that FEMA develop mechanisms to assess deployment outcomes. FEMA said it is modifying its force structure targets, with input from field leadership, and has implemented continuous data collection efforts.

Staff development.—GAO found shortcomings in FEMA's ability to ensure staff training and development for the skills needed in the field. For example, Reservists—often comprising the greatest proportion of FEMA staff in the field during a disaster—faced barriers to staff development and inconsistently received performance evaluations. GAO recommended that FEMA create a staff development program that addresses access to training, development, and feedback. In response, FEMA has taken a number of steps, including process improvements for development opportunities and creating a plan to consistently conduct performance reviews.

GAO will continue to monitor FEMA's actions and assess the extent to which these actions address GAO's recommendations.

These workforce challenges can affect FEMA's ability to achieve its mission to help people before, during, and after disasters. For example, GAO has reported on challenges with inadequate training and low morale for Disaster Recovery Center call center employees. Improving training and employee engagement and morale may help improve services provided to disaster survivors.

With an increase in the frequency and cost of disasters, and with FEMA supporting numerous efforts outside of its normal core responsibilities, GAO is concerned that FEMA personnel may not be prepared to manage a catastrophic natural disaster or concurrent disasters.

Chairwoman Demings, Chairman Correa, Ranking Members Cammack and Meijer, and Members of the subcommittees: Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our work on the challenges facing the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) workforce.

FEMA has long been tasked with the difficult job of leading the Federal response to natural disasters and other emergencies. It funds, manages, and coordinates response and recovery efforts with other Federal agencies; States; local, Tribal, and territorial governments; and others. The increasing frequency of disasters and the additional responsibilities of responding to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, assisting at the Southwest Border, and resettling Afghan refugees have stretched the FEMA workforce in unprecedented ways. In recent years, we have reported on long-standing workforce management challenges within the agency. FEMA management has had to redeploy response personnel from one disaster

to the next, and the agency has reported facing staffing shortfalls in response to some disasters. In addition, a large influx of new employees has added to the challenges of providing timely, program-specific training.

Successfully addressing these challenges is important because, as we reported in May 2020, FEMA's disaster workforce will be in high demand for the foreseeable future.¹ The U.S. Global Change Research Program and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine project that extreme weather events will become more frequent and intense due to climate change.² The historic 2017 and 2018 disaster seasons pushed FEMA well beyond its routine disaster response posture. In 2017, Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, and the severe wildfires in California, collectively affected 47 million people—nearly 15 percent of the Nation's population. In 2018, Hurricanes Florence and Matthew and another severe California wildfire season again necessitated a major Federal response. The numbers of FEMA staff deployed for each of these seasons were more than double the roughly 5,000 personnel deployed at the peak of the 2016 disaster season.

These increased demands on the FEMA workforce persist. FEMA responded to many disasters in 2020, including a record-breaking hurricane season in the Atlantic Ocean, and the most active fire year on record for the West Coast, with record-breaking wildfires in several States.³

Concurrent with this increase in natural disasters, FEMA has been tasked with new responsibilities. In particular, FEMA has played a key role in the Federal response to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to an assessment report issued by FEMA in January 2021, the scale and duration of COVID-19 operations challenged FEMA's capabilities. Among other things, FEMA established mass vaccination sites and provided funeral assistance to families, the scope of which is unprecedented for the agency. We found that between mid-April 2021 and late-June 2021, FEMA received and processed over 222,000 applications for funeral assistance. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, FEMA had processed approximately 6,000 cases of funeral assistance over the past decade.

The increased frequency and cost of disasters and FEMA's support of numerous efforts outside of its normal core responsibilities present challenges to FEMA, as it must ensure that its personnel are prepared to manage a catastrophic natural disaster or concurrent disasters.

My statement today discusses our prior work on FEMA's workforce, including challenges FEMA faces and how these challenges can affect FEMA achieving its mission.

My statement today is based on products we issued from July 2015 to August 2021. To perform our prior work, we reviewed and analyzed Federal law, a non-generalizable sample of post-disaster contracts, agency guidance, and other agency documentation. We also analyzed data from FEMA, the General Services Administration, and the Office of Personnel Management. We interviewed officials from FEMA and other selected Federal agencies; and State, territory, local, and nonprofit officials impacted by disasters. We conducted some of these interviews as part of visits to locations affected by hurricanes in 2017 and 2018, where we also met with disaster survivors. Additionally, we conducted 17 focus groups with FEMA staff. More detailed information on the scope and methodology of our prior work can be found in each of the issued reports cited throughout this statement.

We conducted the work on which this statement is based in accordance with generally accepted Government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusion based on our audit objectives.

¹GAO, *FEMA Disaster Workforce: Actions Needed to Address Deployment and Staff Development Challenges*, GAO-20-360 (Washington, DC: May 4, 2020).

²GAO, *Climate Change: Information on Potential Economic Effects Could Help Guide Federal Efforts to Reduce Fiscal Exposure*, GAO-17-720 (Washington, DC: Sept. 28, 2017). Managing fiscal exposure due to climate change has been on our high-risk list since 2013, in part, because of concerns about the increasing costs of disaster response and recovery efforts. See GAO-21-119SP; also <https://www.gao.gov/highrisk/limiting-federal-governments-fiscal-exposure-better-managing-climate-change-risks>.

³In addition to supporting the COVID-19 response, FEMA supported California's largest fire in history and managed the response to 10 named storms in September 2020 alone. As of February 2021, FEMA had personnel deployed to 173 active disasters and was supporting 956 open disasters.

WORKFORCE CHALLENGES COULD AFFECT FEMA ACHIEVING ITS MISSION

FEMA's Workforce Challenges

In May 2020, we reported that FEMA has faced challenges with: (1) Staffing shortages, (2) workforce qualifications, and (3) staff development, and we made recommendations to address aspects of these challenges.⁴

- *Staffing shortages.*—During the 2017 and 2018 disaster seasons, several large-scale disasters created an unprecedented demand for FEMA's workforce. FEMA deployed 14,684 and 10,328 personnel, respectively, at the peak of each of these seasons and reported staffing shortages. FEMA faced shortages across over half of its cadres—groups organized by operational or programmatic functions—when disasters made landfall or began during the 2017 season, and FEMA faced similar shortages during the 2018 disaster season. For instance, according to FEMA's deployment data, 18 of 23 cadres operated with 25 percent or less of staff available to deploy when Hurricane Maria made landfall in Puerto Rico. In addition, many staff members who were available to deploy declined when requested to do so. For example, 48 percent of FEMA staff declined a deployment to Puerto Rico in 2017 after Hurricane Maria, in part due to the austere conditions and burn-out, and 40 percent declined a deployment to California wildfires in 2018.

With an increase in the frequency and cost of disasters, and with FEMA simultaneously supporting numerous efforts outside of its normal core responsibilities, we are concerned that FEMA personnel may not be prepared to manage a catastrophic natural disaster or concurrent disasters. We recently initiated work related to FEMA's recruitment, hiring, and retention.

- *Workforce qualifications.*—In addition to staffing shortages, we reported that FEMA faced challenges with deploying staff with the right qualifications and skills to meet disaster needs. FEMA field officials reported the qualification status in FEMA's qualification systems was not a reliable indicator of staff's ability to perform in the field. For example, in 14 focus groups we held, participants stated they encountered staff members who were designated as qualified in FEMA's system but did not have the skills or experience to perform effectively in their positions.⁵ Additionally, planning managers in a joint field office we visited said that staff inaccurately designated as qualified in FEMA's qualification system were sometimes only able to complete half of the tasks expected of them, which hindered the cadre's ability to support mission needs. They noted that this affected morale, added to others' workload, and could turn a 12-hour day into a 14-hour day.

We recommended that FEMA develop a plan—with time frames and milestones—to address identified challenges that have hindered FEMA's ability to provide reliable and complete information to field leaders and managers about staff knowledge, skills, and abilities. FEMA concurred with this recommendation. In December 2021, FEMA reported, among other things, developing qualification plans for cadre personnel to better inform field leaders about staff knowledge, skills, and abilities, and we are conducting additional follow-up to assess FEMA's actions. To address the complex and interrelated challenges we identified, it will be important for FEMA to take a comprehensive approach to this issue and consider cross-cutting solutions.

We also found that FEMA did not have a plan to evaluate staffing challenges. Specifically, we found that FEMA lacked mechanisms to assess deployment outcomes or the extent to which it deployed the right mix of staff at the right time to meet mission needs. FEMA collected data related to staffing levels and availability, such as comparing staff qualification rates to targets and tracking the number of staff deployed to disasters. However, these measures did not directly demonstrate deployment outcomes or how effectively FEMA deployed available staff. Without the ability to assess outcomes, FEMA officials lacked critical information to evaluate the effectiveness of its deployment strategies.

We recommended that FEMA develop mechanisms, including collecting data to determine how effectively its workforce was deployed to meet mission needs. FEMA concurred with this recommendation. FEMA officials have stated that the agency is making progress toward meeting the force structure targets it established in 2019 and has a process in place to modify the targets as needed. In December 2021, FEMA officials said FEMA is modifying its force structure

⁴GAO-20-360.

⁵The number of focus groups in this section excludes the 3 focus groups we conducted with local hires. We excluded them from the counts because local hires do not consistently use the FEMA Qualification System.

targets, with input from field leadership, and has implemented continuous data collection efforts. We are continuing to assess whether these efforts address our recommendation, which focuses on FEMA systematically collecting feedback and relevant data on the extent to which its deployment processes met field needs during disasters.

We designated these 2 recommendations related to workforce qualifications as priority recommendations for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), meaning we believe they warrant priority attention and can substantially improve or transform major Government programs or agencies.⁶

- *Staff development.*—Finally, we found shortcomings in FEMA’s ability to ensure staff development—that consists of training courses, on-the-job learning, coaching, and mentoring—for the skills and abilities needed in the field. Staff told us they received inadequate on-the-job training or coaching, even though most participants in our focus groups said that these types of learning are the most useful. We found that at the start of their deployment during the 2017 and 2018 disaster seasons, 36 percent of FEMA’s incident management workforce did not have an official assigned to coach and evaluate their task performance—the primary mechanism the agency depends on for coaching. Furthermore, when such officials were assigned, they often lacked time to coach staff. For example, officials at one of the joint field offices we visited said mission needs always come first and coaching and evaluating responsibilities are frequently not a priority. Supervisors in the field also often inconsistently completed performance evaluations for deployed staff. Additionally, Reservists—who often comprise the greatest proportion of FEMA staff in the field during a disaster and make up 35 percent of FEMA’s workforce as of August 2021—faced barriers to accessing developmental opportunities when not deployed, including lack of paid time and technology needed to access training. Effective and consistent staff development is particularly important because FEMA has hired a large number of Reservists over the past few years. Our analysis of FEMA data showed that from June 1, 2017 to May 31, 2019, the agency hired over 3,200 Reservists, which was 40 percent of the agency’s entire Reservist workforce as of June 1, 2019. The challenges associated with underqualified staff we noted previously underscore the need for a comprehensive staff development program that would equip all staff to meet mission needs in the field.

We recommended that FEMA create a staff development program that addresses access to training, on-the-job training, use of performance evaluations, and consistent developmental opportunities regardless of whether FEMA employees are deployed. FEMA concurred with our recommendation and has taken a number of steps to improve staff development. Steps FEMA has taken include developing processes to improve access to training and coaching and creating a plan to consistently conduct performance reviews during deployment. We are continuing to monitor FEMA’s actions to assess the extent to which these actions constitute an integrated and cohesive program to develop its workforce and help ensure the best results for disaster survivors.

We have also reported on the importance of employee engagement to achieving an agency’s mission.⁷ Based on the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, FEMA’s measure of employee engagement recently increased.⁸ In 2019, FEMA’s Employee Engagement score was 65.8, placing it sixth out of 15 DHS components. That number trended upwards in 2020, to 72.2 in 2020, moving it to fourth within DHS and on par with the Government-wide average of 72.4. Further, in the survey, 87.6 percent of FEMA employees said they know how their work is related to agency goals. FEMA has a critical mission to help people be-

⁶See GAO, *Priority Open Recommendations: Department of Homeland Security*, GAO-21-377PR (Washington, DC: Aug. 13, 2021).

⁷In 2015, we reported that a number of studies of private-sector entities have found that increased levels of employee engagement result in better individual and organizational performance. This includes increased employee performance and productivity; higher customer service ratings; fewer safety incidents; and less absenteeism and turnover. Studies of the public sector, while more limited, have shown similar benefits. See GAO, *Federal Workforce: Additional Analysis and Sharing of Promising Practices Could Improve Employee Engagement and Performance*, GAO-15-585 (Washington, DC: July 14, 2015). For more information about employee engagement at DHS and its component agencies, such as FEMA, see GAO, *DHS Employee Morale: Some Improvements Made, but Additional Actions Needed to Strengthen Employee Engagement*, GAO-21-204 (Washington, DC: January 12, 2021).

⁸The Office of Personnel Management administers the annual Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey and uses the responses to calculate the employee engagement index. The Office of Personnel Management defines employee engagement as employees’ sense of purpose that is evident in their display of dedication, persistence, and effort in their work or overall attachment to their organization and its mission.

fore, during, and after disasters, and each employee plays a role in achieving the agency's mission. However, the stress of challenges we mentioned today, including staffing shortages, coupled with burn-out associated with the increased frequency of disasters and an expanded scope of responsibility over time, have the potential to negatively affect FEMA employees' engagement and morale. Additionally, in recent years, there have been concerns about FEMA's workplace culture and climate, specifically regarding harassment and discrimination, which can affect workforce morale and retention.⁹ We have on-going work on FEMA's actions to address harassment and discrimination. We expect to report these findings in fall 2022.

Examples of How Workforce Challenges Affect FEMA's Mission

Experiences from the 2017 and 2018 disaster seasons highlight the importance of continuing to make progress on addressing the long-standing workforce management challenges. Such workforce challenges can affect FEMA's ability to carry out its mission. We have reported examples of how these workforce challenges affect FEMA's operations and those FEMA serves, including that: (1) Contracting staff shortages exacerbated challenges for recovery efforts (2) Public Assistance programs in Puerto Rico faced challenges due to high staff turnover, and (3) low morale and inadequate training at call centers decreased the quality of service delivery.

Contracting staff shortages exacerbated challenges for recovery efforts. In April 2019, we reported on the Federal Government's contracting efforts for preparedness, response, and recovery efforts related to the 2017 hurricanes and California wildfires. We found, among other things, that FEMA experienced contracting staffing shortages, which exacerbated challenges for disaster response and recovery.¹⁰

As we reported in April 2019, FEMA cited that contracting workforce shortages severely taxed its contracting processes and personnel. For example, 8 of FEMA's 10 regional offices, which cover all U.S. States and territories, had only one permanent full-time contracting official. Regional offices are responsible for managing post-disaster contracts, which are awarded after a disaster hits, even if regional procurement staff were not involved in the initial award of those contracts. Post-disaster contracts can last for years after a disaster occurs.

In that report, we noted that FEMA took some steps to address gaps in its contracting workforce. For example, officials told us they planned to hire additional contracting staff; however, it was unclear when these staff would be hired or how they would be allocated across FEMA's Office of the Chief Procurement Officer. Furthermore, we also found that FEMA had not assessed its contracting workforce needs since 2014. Without such an assessment, FEMA is at risk of not having a sufficient contracting workforce during a disaster. We recommended that FEMA assess its workforce needs—including staffing levels, mission needs, and skill gaps—for contracting staff, to include regional offices and Disaster Acquisition Response Teams; and develop a plan, including time lines, to address any gaps. FEMA concurred with this recommendation. FEMA identified a number of actions it would take to address this recommendation including competency modeling for its contracting staff and a workforce analysis to identify skill gaps. As of May 2021, these actions were still in progress.

Public Assistance programs in Puerto Rico faced challenges due to high staff turnover. In our March 2019 report on recovery efforts in Puerto Rico, we found that workforce capacity constraints were a challenge.¹¹ We reported that both FEMA and municipal officials had concerns about FEMA staff turnover and lack of knowledge about how the Public Assistance alternative procedures were to be applied in Puerto Rico.¹² While several municipal officials we spoke to remarked positively on con-

⁹In 2018, FEMA began an investigation into allegations of harassment and misconduct by a senior executive within the agency. In 2019, FEMA commissioned a survey from the RAND Corporation to estimate the prevalence of harassment and discrimination. In its 2020 report, the RAND Corporation estimated that 29 percent of FEMA employees experienced discrimination or harassment related to sex, gender, or race/ethnicity in the previous year. See RAND Corporation, *Harassment and Discrimination on the Basis of Gender and Race/Ethnicity in the FEMA Workforce* (2020).

¹⁰GAO, *2017 Disaster Contracting: Actions Needed to Improve the Use of Post-Disaster Contracts to Support Response and Recovery*, GAO-19-281 (Washington, DC: April 24, 2019).

¹¹GAO, *Puerto Rico Hurricanes: Status of FEMA Funding, Oversight, and Recovery Challenges*, GAO-19-256 (Washington, DC: Mar. 14, 2019).

¹²Unlike in the standard Public Assistance program where FEMA will fund the actual cost of a project, the Public Assistance alternative procedures allow awards for permanent work projects to be made on the basis of fixed cost estimates to provide financial incentives for the timely and cost-effective completion of work. This makes the recipient or subrecipient respon-

sistent communication with FEMA officials, municipal officials in six municipalities we visited cited high levels of turnover among FEMA staff as a challenge with the recovery process.¹³ For example, officials in three municipalities said that discontinuity in FEMA personnel had caused them to have duplicative conversations with FEMA. This issue has persisted over time, as we reported in our February 2020 report on continuing disaster recovery efforts in Puerto Rico.¹⁴ Municipal and Puerto Rico agency officials we spoke to experienced confusion about changing FEMA Public Assistance guidance partly due to changing points of contact.¹⁵ We reported that reliance on Central Office of Recovery, Reconstruction, and Resilience, which was created by the Government of Puerto Rico, or individual FEMA staff to deliver and distribute FEMA guidance posed a risk that the guidance would not be accessible to all partners involved in recovery efforts. FEMA officials acknowledged that they faced difficulties in disseminating information in Puerto Rico. We recommended FEMA develop a repository for all current applicable Public Assistance policies and guidance for Puerto Rico and make it available to all recovery partners.

In response to this recommendation, FEMA made Public Assistance policies and guidance documents accessible to Puerto Rico recovery partners through its internal Public Assistance application management system. By doing so, FEMA improved the accessibility of information and its assurance that recovery partners are aware of current guidance. With real-time access to FEMA's current applicable guidance, there could be less confusion and need for additional requests for clarification. Even with improved access to policies and guidance, FEMA employees will continue to be an important source of information and support for disaster survivors and local officials. The local officials' experiences we previously reported on highlight how FEMA's workforce challenges, including staff turnover, can affect disaster recovery efforts.

Low morale and inadequate training at call centers affected service delivery. Other examples of how workforce challenges can affect FEMA's services include challenges with call center employee morale and training. In September 2020, we reported that for several years leading up to our reporting, FEMA's call center workforce faced challenges using program guidance to assist survivors and struggled with low morale.¹⁶ We also reported that following the catastrophic 2017 hurricane season, call center staff worked without adequate training, in part due to high disaster activity in 2017 and 2018. The training FEMA provided did not effectively support staff in applying guidance to answer survivors' questions and process cases encountered in their work, according to National Processing Service Center staff. In addition, Disaster Recovery Centers provide an important resource to survivors who do not have electricity or reliable cell phone service, as is often the case following a disaster, as well as those who do not regularly use computers. However, the limitations of staff qualifications and capabilities at these locations resulted in missed opportunities to help survivors quickly.

In that report, we also found that opportunities existed to improve employee engagement and morale among National Processing Service Center staff. Staff we spoke to consistently cited engagement challenges that undermined morale in all 4 call center locations. According to National Processing Service Center staff at all 4 locations, poor employee engagement from their management and supervisors resulted in pressures related to productivity, among other challenges, particularly since the 2017 hurricane season generated a high work volume for Individual & Households Program call center staff. National Processing Service Center staff in all 4 locations stated they felt pressured to meet productivity standards, which conflicted with providing quality service to the survivor.

sible for any project costs that exceed the agreed-upon fixed-cost estimate. However, if actual costs are less than the fixed-cost estimate, the recipient or subrecipient may use all or part of excess funds for other eligible purposes, such as additional cost-effective hazard mitigation measures to increase the resilience of public infrastructure, see 42 U.S.C. § 5189f. For more information, see GAO-19-256.

¹³ During interviews with officials from 10 selected municipalities, officials identified various challenges during the course of our discussions. When we reported the number of municipalities that identified a particular challenge, this did not necessarily mean that the remaining municipalities did not also experience the challenge. It meant that those municipalities did not raise the challenge during the course of our interviews.

¹⁴ GAO, *Puerto Rico Disaster Recovery: FEMA Actions Needed to Strengthen Project Cost Estimation and Awareness of Program Guidance*, GAO-20-221 (Washington, DC: Feb. 5, 2020).

¹⁵ FEMA iteratively developed, refined, and clarified Public Assistance guidance in Puerto Rico to respond and adapt to changing recovery conditions since the 2017 hurricanes.

¹⁶ GAO, *Disaster Assistance: Additional Actions Needed to Strengthen FEMA's Individuals and Households Program*, GAO-20-503 (Washington, DC: Sep. 30, 2020).

We recommended, among other things, that FEMA use desirable characteristics of employee engagement—including performance feedback, career development, communication, and attention to work-life balance—while completing planned activities for improving morale among call center staff, assessing staff satisfaction scores, and identifying additional steps to strengthen employee morale. We also recommended that FEMA assess the effectiveness of the staff training for the Individuals & Households Program and implement strategies to ensure staff deployed to the Disaster Recovery Centers has the needed capabilities to provide support to survivors. DHS concurred with our recommendations and has taken steps to address them, but has not yet completed planned work, partly due to increased disaster operations and the COVID-19 pandemic. Addressing these recommendations remains important, particularly given that FEMA has since established a dedicated call center number and staff to the COVID-19 funeral assistance program.

Thank you, Chairwoman Demings, Chairman Correa, Ranking Members Cammack and Meijer, and Members of the subcommittees. This concludes my prepared statement. I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have at this time.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Thank you so much for your testimony. The Chair now recognizes Ms. Sims to summarize her statement for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF CARRA S. SIMS, SENIOR BEHAVIORAL AND
SOCIAL SCIENTIST, THE RAND CORPORATION**

Ms. SIMS. Thank you, Chairman and Chairwoman, Ranking Members of the subcommittees for allowing me to testify today. I am a principal investigator and author of a study published in December 2020 on the prevalence and characteristics of civil rights violations at FEMA. First, I am going to tell you a little bit about the history of the study. Next, I will share some results. Finally, I will highlight some of our recommendations.

In 2018, FEMA executed an internal investigation into sexual harassment and misconduct in its senior leadership ranks. Unlike most organizations confronted with these issues, FEMA leaders chose to openly discuss and address the problems. As part of that, they reached out to us to provide an independent and objective assessment across the organization about the overall prevalence and characteristics of harassment and discrimination at FEMA.

Working with FEMA, we decided to focus on two classes of civil rights violation that we and they felt were likely to be most common. First, harassment and discrimination on the basis of sex and gender. Second, harassment and discrimination on the basis of race/ethnicity. I use the term civil rights violation to apply to both. Now, I will review three main findings, though you can find more detailed results in the written testimony and, of course, in the written report.

First, we found civil rights violations affected many employees in the FEMA work force. Almost one-third of employees categorized as having experienced at least one gender-based or race/ethnicity-based civil rights violation in the previous year. Women were more likely to experience these than were men. Groups such as African American employees experienced these more frequently as well. Rates of civil rights violations varied across offices as you can see in Figure 2 of my written testimony.

Second, we also examined perceptions about key leadership, key leaders that play a critical role in overall workplace climate for gender-based and race/ethnicity-based harassment. As well as looking at climate or general workplace instability. As an example of

a key leadership behavior, it is a legal requirement that supervisors forward reports to them to an appropriate authority. However, about one-fourth of women were not sure that their supervisors would report sexual harassment to the right FEMA authority. About one-fourth of African American employees felt similarly with regard to how their supervisors would handle a racial/ethnic harassment complaint. About 40 percent of women and African American employees expressed similar sentiments about FEMA senior leaders. In general, men had more positive perceptions of the work environment at FEMA than women did. In addition, White and Hispanic employees had more positive perceptions of the work environment than did African American employees. This suggests FEMA employees perceive discrepancies in the leadership enforcement of workplace norms for professional behavior.

Third, employees' concerns are also reflected in the actions that employees took after experiencing a civil rights violation. FEMA employees did not always report the incident, not to an official channel. Top barriers to reporting included that the employee did not think anything would be done and they wanted to forget about it and move on. Most FEMA employees who reported discrimination, were not satisfied with FEMA's response, possibly due to the actions taken or not. In fact, about 40 percent of those having reported discrimination were encouraged to just drop the issue. Of those who reported harassment, one-fourth or more indicated having been subject to some form of retaliation, which is itself illegal, as did more than one-third who reported discrimination.

If FEMA employees are to trust the system in which they report these negative workplace experiences, then accountability and transparency at all levels of leadership is essential. Finally, I will discuss a few of our recommendations. We suggested FEMA explore differences in climate between offices that had low and high rates of civil rights violations. We also suggested they increase accountability and transparency in dealing with violations and ensure that leaders at all levels understand how best to do so. We suggested they continue monitoring harassment and discrimination in the work force. Evidence that harassment and discrimination exists within their walls is unwelcomed to organizations unwilling to do the work to improve their workplace environment for their employees.

FEMA is the only organization, to our knowledge, to confront such evidence voluntarily and publicly. This effort offers the opportunity to move the evidence-based needle not just for FEMA, but also more broadly for other organizations on appropriate interventions to reduce and prevent harassment and discrimination. Congressional support for such efforts is critical. Thank you, again, for the opportunity to appear before you today about this important subject. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Sims follows:]

JANUARY 20, 2022

Thank you Chairwoman Demings and Chairman Correa and Ranking Members Cammack and Meijer for allowing me to testify before this joint hearing of your subcommittees today. I am Carra Sims, a senior behavioral and social scientist with the nonprofit, nonpartisan RAND Corporation and principal investigator and author of a study published in December 2020 on the prevalence and characteristics of sexual harassment, gender discrimination, racial/ethnic harassment, and racial/ethnic discrimination at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

In 2018, FEMA executed an internal investigation into sexual harassment and misconduct in its senior leadership ranks. However, very unusually, they did not stop there. Unlike most organizations confronted with these issues, FEMA leaders chose to openly discuss and address the problems. As part of this effort, they reached out to the Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center (HSOAC)—which is operated by RAND for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)—to provide an independent and objective assessment across the organization of both the overall prevalence and the characteristics of harassment and discrimination at FEMA.

We found that civil rights violations had affected many employees in the FEMA workforce. Twenty percent of employees categorized as having experienced a gender-based/sexual civil rights violation, and 18.4 percent of employees categorized as having experienced a violation on the basis of race/ethnicity in the year prior to the survey. The risk of experiencing such a violation varied across FEMA offices, and employee perceptions of leadership behaviors that set a climate for harassment and civility varied by demographic group. Employees' actions after experiencing a civil rights violation reflect these perceptions; many did not report their concerns formally and for those that did, though some experienced a positive result, a substantial minority did not.

In light of these findings, we recommended that the agency:

1. explore differences in culture and climate between offices that had low rates of civil rights violations and those with higher rates
2. explore interventions with leaders at all levels to ensure that leaders understand how best to handle harassment and understand their responsibility to address it
3. reduce barriers to reporting
4. increase accountability and transparency in dealing with harassment and discrimination reports at all levels of leadership
5. continue monitoring harassment and discrimination in the workforce.

Now I'd like to go into a bit more detail about the study and its findings as I think the subcommittees might find the information helpful.

THE STUDY AND FINDINGS

After FEMA's 2018 internal investigation into sexual harassment and misconduct, FEMA leaders chose to openly discuss the problems and the need to develop and maintain a workplace in which all employees are treated with professionalism and respect. Although FEMA's investigation provided insights into the culture and misconduct in one FEMA office, it was not designed to provide a comprehensive account of harassment and discrimination across the organization; that was HSOAC's task.

Working with FEMA, we prioritized key areas of focus for a survey that would provide them with an objective assessment of prevalence.

¹The opinions and conclusions expressed in this testimony are the author's alone and should not be interpreted as representing those of the RAND Corporation or any of the sponsors of its research.

²The RAND Corporation is a research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure, healthier and more prosperous. RAND is nonprofit, nonpartisan, and committed to the public interest. RAND's mission is enabled through its core values of quality and objectivity and its commitment to integrity and ethical behavior. RAND subjects its research publications to a robust and exacting quality-assurance process; avoids financial and other conflicts of interest through staff training, project screening, and a policy of mandatory disclosure; and pursues transparency through the open publication of research findings and recommendations, disclosure of the source of funding of published research, and policies to ensure intellectual independence. This testimony is not a research publication, but witnesses affiliated with RAND routinely draw on relevant research conducted in the organization.

We decided to focus on two classes of civil rights violation: First, harassment and discrimination on the basis of sex/gender, given the origin of the survey effort, and second, harassment and discrimination on the basis of race/ethnicity.

We did not want to use a lengthy survey that included every possible workplace problem because it might not be answered thoroughly and carefully, leading to biased results. Race/ethnicity was selected because both we and FEMA hypothesized that it would be the second-most common form of discrimination in the workplace, with gender-based concerns being the most common.³ We intended to provide a more complete description of the types of civil rights violations experienced by FEMA employees. (Civil rights violation is an umbrella term that includes harassment and discrimination on the basis of membership in any protected class.)

We also focused on perceptions of leadership climate for gender-based and race/ethnicity-based harassment, assessing perceptions of leadership behaviors. Such behaviors play a critical role in establishing and maintaining climate.⁴

We used multiple survey items to ensure that we covered key aspects of harassment climate. These key aspects included employees' perceptions related to the risk of making a complaint, perceptions of possible sanctions for the perpetrator, and perceptions that their concerns would be taken seriously.⁵ We assessed both perceptions of severe behaviors and examples of experiences that happen frequently and are sometimes considered less severe. We measured climate at two levels: The immediate supervisor and FEMA senior leadership. Finally, we examined general workplace incivility, which is low-intensity, deviant behavior that is not specifically directed at a protected class of employee but speaks to workplace climate.

HSOAC fielded this survey in April and May 2019. Of the 21,982 FEMA personnel invited to participate, 8,946 responded (a 44.9-percent response rate). These responses were weighted to represent the FEMA population.

Overall, civil rights violations affected many employees in the FEMA workforce, with 20.0 percent of employees categorized as having experienced a gender-based/sexual civil rights violation; women were more likely to experience a civil rights violation (26 percent) than were men (14 percent).

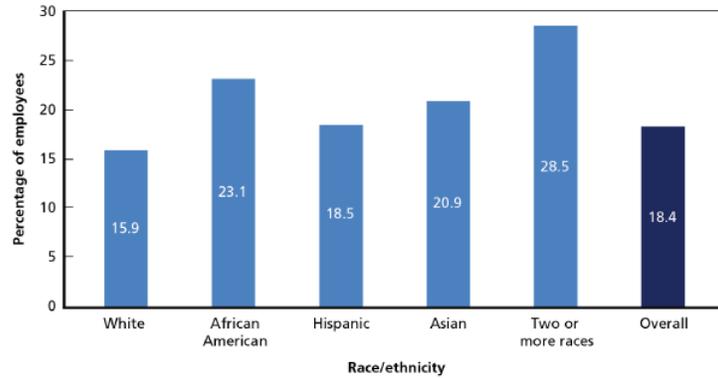
As shown in Figure S.1, 18.4 percent of employees were categorized as having experienced a violation on the basis of race/ethnicity in the past year.

³We used behaviorally-based survey measures to estimate the percentage of FEMA employees who had experienced at least one civil rights violation in the preceding year. These measures of harassment and discrimination first documented inappropriate workplace behaviors, followed by (where applicable) an assessment of additional legal requirements necessary for these experiences to rise to the level of civil rights violations. We categorized an employee as having experienced a civil rights violation if their survey answers indicated that someone from work had engaged in (1) harassing behavior that offended the respondent and was either persistent or severe or (2) behavior perceived as discriminatory that caused a workplace harm. This classification treats the survey respondents' answers as accurate. An independent investigation of the experiences described by respondents could discover that some people had experienced civil rights violations even though we had not classified them as having had one, while some people whom we classified as having experienced violations did not.

⁴M.G. Ehrhart, B. Schneider, and W.H. Macey, *Organizational Climate and Culture: An Introduction to Theory, Research, and Practice*, New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2014.

⁵C.L. Hulin, L.F. Fitzgerald, and F. Drasgow, "Organizational Influences on Sexual Harassment," in M.S. Stockdale, ed., *Sexual Harassment in the Workplace: Perspectives, Frontiers, and Response Strategies*, Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, Inc., 1996, pp. 127–150.

Figure 1. Estimated Percentage of FEMA Employees Categorized as Having Experienced Race/Ethnicity–Based Civil Rights Violation in the Preceding Year, by Race/Ethnicity



Based on the 2019 survey, we estimated that about one in three FEMA employees experienced at least one gender-based/sexual or race/ethnicity-based civil rights violation in the preceding year.

Risk Varies By Office

Rates of civil rights violations varied across offices. For example, women in Mission Support and the Office of the Chief Financial Officer were less likely to be categorized as having experienced gender-based/sexual harassment than women in other offices. Similarly, the estimated rate of racial/ethnic harassment was lower in Mission Support and in the Office of the Chief Financial Officer than in other offices. Figure 2 shows one of these findings.

Figure 2. Estimated Percentage of FEMA Employees Categorized as Having Experienced Gender Based/Sexual Harassment Civil Rights Violation in the Preceding Year



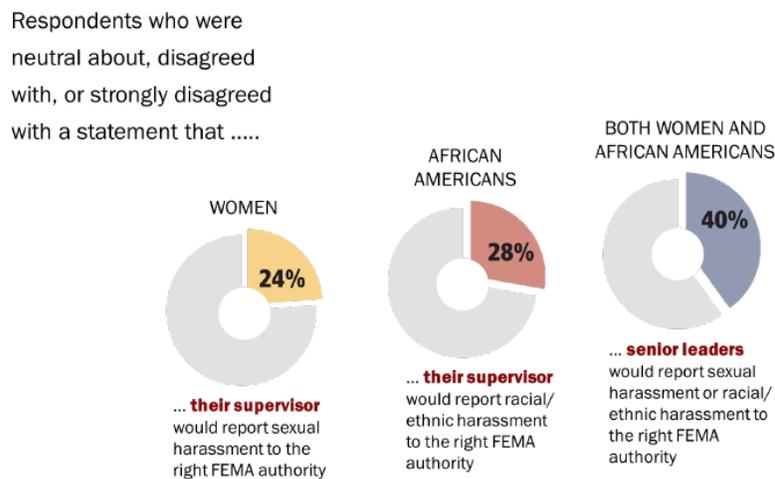
SOME EMPLOYEES MISTRUST LEADERSHIP, AND PERCEPTIONS OF WORK ENVIRONMENT VARY

Findings from our climate assessment suggest some areas of concern. Despite the majority of FEMA employees saying that leaders would respond appropriately to harassing behaviors, a fairly substantial proportion perceived leadership behaviors as neutral at best and perhaps actively harmful. FEMA employees’ perceptions of

their direct supervisors' responses to sexual and racial/ethnic harassment were consistently more positive than their perceptions of senior-level FEMA leaders' responses.

For example, 24 percent of women indicated that they were neutral about, disagreed with, or strongly disagreed with a statement that their supervisors would report sexual harassment to the right FEMA authority, while approximately 28 percent of African-American employees had similar opinions about how their supervisors would handle racial/ethnic harassment. Approximately 40 percent of women and 40 percent of African-American employees expressed similar sentiments about senior leaders. Figure 3 shows these results.

Figure 3. Responses to Behaviorally Based Gender and Racial/Ethnic Climate Item



In general, men had more positive perceptions of the work environment at FEMA than women did. This was true for perceptions of their supervisors, FEMA leader response to sexual harassment, and the general work environment climate.

In addition, African-American employees tended to have less-positive perceptions of the climate for racial/ethnic harassment and the general work environment climate than White or Hispanic employees had.

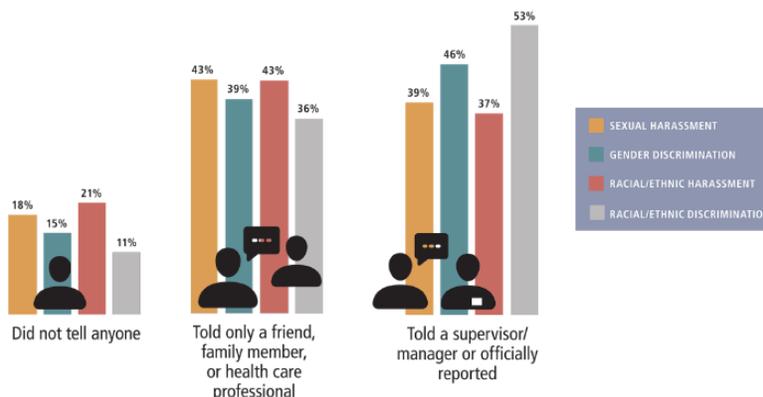
To the extent that enforcement of workplace norms for civility and professional behavior relies on strong, consistent, and unambiguous support for appropriate norms, this suggests that FEMA employees perceive discrepancies.

Reporting Decisions Suggest That Barriers Exist

FEMA employees' concerns are reflected in the actions that they took after a civil rights violation. Only one-third to one-half of FEMA employees who had experiences consistent with harassment or discrimination in the preceding year had reported the incident to a supervisor or manager or through another official channel (see Figure 4).⁶ The top three barriers to reporting were that the employee "did not think anything would be done" about it, wanting to "forget about it and move on," and fearing being "labeled as a troublemaker."

⁶One important issue to consider when exploring why someone does or does not report harassment or discrimination is whether the victim considers the experience to be something worth reporting. This judgment often hinges on whether the victim labels the experience as harassment or as discrimination. It is not uncommon for people who describe experiences on a survey that are classified as harassment or discrimination to not label these experiences as civil rights violations—that is, not to consider their experiences as harassment or discrimination on the basis of a protected class. Most lay people are not familiar with laws surrounding Title VII or equal employment opportunity law and related regulations, and, although they might view their experiences as problematic, they were unlikely to be able to label them as civil rights violations (L.F. Fitzgerald, S. Swan, and K. Fischer, "Why Didn't She Just Report Him? The Psychological and Legal Implications of Women's Responses to Sexual Harassment," *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 51, No. 1, 1995, pp. 117–138.).

Figure 4. Disclosure Decisions Among FEMA Employees Who Had Experienced Harassment or Discrimination in the Preceding Year



Many of the common barriers to reporting can be alleviated by ensuring that leadership at all levels knows what to do with a report and has the tools at hand to take action. Supervisors should also be held accountable for dealing with concerns of retaliation. Including an evaluation of how supervisors handle these issues as part of the performance review cycle is one possibility; it is unclear whether this is already a consistent part of that process at FEMA.

Most FEMA employees who reported discrimination felt either neutral or dissatisfied with FEMA's response. This result could be related to the actions taken in response to the report: About 40 percent of those having reported gender (40.0 percent) or racial/ethnic discrimination (42.1 percent) were encouraged to drop the issue, and 39.6 percent of those who reported gender discrimination and 34.2 percent of those who reported racial/ethnic discrimination indicated that the person that they told had taken no action to improve the situation.

Employees also noted frequent retaliation. Of those who reported harassment, 20 percent or more indicated having been subject to some form of retaliation. Of those who reported discrimination, 35 percent or more indicated having been subject to retaliation.

If FEMA employees are to trust the system through which they must report negative workplace behaviors, then accountability and transparency at all levels of leadership should be increased so that employees have some sense that action will be taken to protect them from further negative workplace experiences.

Continue Monitoring Harassment and Discrimination in the Workforce

This study provides a baseline of workplace harassment and discrimination at FEMA. Refielding the survey every 2 or 4 years would allow FEMA leadership to track the prevalence of civil rights violations in the workforce over time and would provide an objective measure of the effectiveness of any policy changes and prevention efforts.

CONCLUSION

The data from this survey has few comparators. Measures of violations are not the same across organizations, which makes direct comparisons with other organizations difficult. Differences in civil rights violation rates could be caused by a genuine difference in the prevalence of violations, or they could simply be a consequence of different measurement strategies.⁷

Moreover, organizations that are not required to measure the prevalence of violations are unlikely to do so, and they are even less likely to report their findings. Other than the military, which is required by law to assess the prevalence of these types of experiences, organizations that assess violations tend to be required to do so as part of the evidence-gathering process for a class-action lawsuit.

Evidence that harassment and discrimination exist is unwelcome to organizations unwilling to do the work to create better working environments for their employees.

⁷This is the case not only with measurement of harassment and discrimination but also with other measures that do not use the same items.

FEMA is the only organization, to our knowledge, to confront such evidence voluntarily and publicly, demonstrating the agency's commitment to face issues head-on and work to improve. This effort highlights FEMA's commitment to transparency to the public and to its employees as it tackles these issues. It also offers the opportunity to advance the study of harassment and discrimination in the workplace and help solve issues elsewhere.

Changing organizational culture and climate is no easy task, and prescriptions for how to do so tend to be so vague as to not be useful. A comprehensive and holistic set of interventions that incentivize professional and respectful workplace behavior could help leaders prevent and effectively address negative behaviors in the FEMA work environment. One vital component in organizational change, however, is measurement of the problem. Supporting organizations that measure transparently and share their findings helps establish an evidence basis for other organizations that wish to alleviate issues of harassment and discrimination in the workplace. Given the relative lack of comparators and empirical guidance,⁸ organizations that engage in interventions and report results are standard-bearers whose transparency can help society change for the better. FEMA now has an empirical estimate of the prevalence of gender-based/sexual and race/ethnicity-based harassment and discrimination to serve as a yardstick against which to measure change efforts.

Chairwoman, Chairman, and Ranking Members, thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today about this important subject. I look forward to answering your questions.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Thank you so much for your testimony and thank you to all of the witnesses. I will remind the subcommittees that we will each have 5 minutes to question the panel. I will now recognize myself for questions and I appreciate the panel's indulgence as we are in the middle of votes.

This question is for all of you. FEMA's work force has supported the Federal Government's response to a growing number of obligations, including numerous record-breaking disasters, Operation Allies Welcome, and the COVID-19 response. Just last week, FEMA was tasked with additional responsibilities in the on-going fight against COVID-19, including creating new testing sites and assessing National hospital bed capacity. FEMA's ever-increasing workload has caused a significant strain on the work force, resulting in employees leaving the agency at increased rates. What would you say FEMA can do or Congress can do to help prevent burn-out in the work force? Mr. FUGATE, I will start with you.

Mr. FUGATE. Well, you know, part of the question is with all of these other things coming in, is this really FEMA's job? My answer is, yes. You created FEMA not just to respond to natural hazards. FEMA was created to respond to disasters that require the capabilities that FEMA has been blessed with, with the funding and capabilities that you have given them. So, the question is: Should you take things away from FEMA? I think that is the wrong answer.

I think the better answer is how do we make sure FEMA has the work force required to do this? They lean heavily on the ability to fund out of the Stafford Act, the Reservists, and their CORE, which are their full-time not permanent employees that are termed employees that they use in disaster response. But I would also go back and look at your career base. FEMA has not substantially grown since Hurricane Katrina, yet the workload has been growing quite rapidly. So, it is always a touchy issue when you talk about grow-

⁸See, e.g., evidence presented in C.R. Feldblum and V.A. Lipnic, *Select Task Force on Harassment in the Workplace*, Washington, DC: U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2016; and National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine*, Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2018.

ing the work force, you need more people. The reality is FEMA is going to need to look at staffing requirements going forward with the mission set to frequency of disasters in the career work force. Balance that with the funding from the Stafford Act employees that are the CORE and the Reservists and making the Reservists more practical as a retention function, again, going back to the benefits. As the GAO pointed out, and I tried to do this and found out I couldn't do this, is how do you train them when they are not deployed to a disaster? Because they are paid by disaster, not out of a general fund that could be used for all of those points.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Thank you so much. Mr. Currie.

Mr. CURRIE. I mean, I agree with a lot of what has been said. But I think it actually, some of this is a good thing for FEMA because they are reliable. The reason they get asked to do so much is because they have the authority, the funding, the relationships in the State and local level to execute logistics like in the pandemic response. Next to the military, there is nobody better. So, in many ways it is a good thing because it means their response function is working pretty well. But I think the bottom line is that the work force structure has not been transformed and evolved to fit what we are asking them to do right now.

But I also think there are multiple sides to this. I mean, there is the hiring and the flexibilities piece of like what do we need? Then how do we get what we need and how does it need to function? But internally too, you mentioned the retention issue. It is just as important, you know, if we are going to hire 6,000 in the last few years like they had, the internal functioning better work pretty well too. Or else you are not going to retain these people. It doesn't matter if you hire 6,000 people if you lose 3,000 of them.

So, I think we have to look at all of it. That is why I think there needs to be a more holistic transformation effort looked at in this regard and figure out, you know, what maybe legislative changes might be needed. What can FEMA do on its own? Maybe there are special authorities similar to what has been done in the past with the National Guard or the military reserves that can be done to help some of these training and deployment challenges that we face. So, I think that, you know, it has got to be a multi-faceted approach.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Ms. Sims? Yes, Ms. Sims.

Ms. SIMS. Hi. I will agree to the holistic approach. I had a pretty specific study but, you know, making sure the backend harassment and discrimination have been linked to retention. So, you know, alleviating these kinds of workplace challenges also helps keep your work force intact. I see we are running out of time, so.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Thank you all so much. I will now go to the gentlewoman from Iowa, Mrs. Miller-Meeks, for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS. Thank you, Chair Demings. This is a question for Mr. Fugate and Mr. Currie. From responding to disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic to assisting with UACs along the border and assisting in the resettlement of Afghan refugees, FEMA has a number of competing priorities. How are these competing and added responsibilities affecting the FEMA work force?

Mr. FUGATE. Ma'am, I will start first. Again, when you look at all the things that FEMA is doing, the one that takes the most peo-

ple is responding to disasters. That is the bulk of the work force. What FEMA is doing in the coordination of the COVID is less about deploying people but using headquarters and regional functions to coordinate that and coordinate other agency staff. FEMA is not actually sending their people into hospitals. They are coordinating HHS and other resources on behalf of the Governors. That is something they are built and set up to do.

Again, when I was in FEMA, we dealt with the Southwest Border. We were given the mission by the White House to do the unaccompanied children. It was a skill set we had because it was mass care taking care of children. So, while those seem to be very large operations, it turned out that in an organization of almost 20,000, what you will find is it is a task, but it is not overwhelming. The bulk of the large force of FEMA is actually tied up in responding to and more importantly, what was pointed out, is the recovery from disasters for years. Thank you.

Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS. Mr. Currie.

Mr. CURRIE. Sure, thank you. If I remember right, from talking to you before, I believe you come from a public health background, right? So, I will use the COVID example with FEMA. So, something that was never envisioned 3 or 4 years ago with a pandemic like this is that we would have, you know, almost 60 Federally-declared disasters across the States, territories, Tribes for a public health emergency. So, just in that alone, FEMA is processing—I don't have an exact number, but the last one I have seen is, you know, well over 30, maybe 40,000 grantees for the pandemic just on grant reimbursements alone for PPE, COVID costs, schools, you name it. So, you add that on top of what I said before, which is like almost 1,000 prior disaster recovery declarations where they are still processing public assistance claims, the grants. That alone is just astronomical.

I actually don't think the Afghan and the border tasking, that is more the response side of the house. They deploy quickly. They use their resources. They get out. I think what we see is this long tail on recovery and processing projects. By the way, this is probably what you hear most frustration about at the State and local level is, you know, where is my grant money? Where is my reimbursements? Why are we fighting over this? But this is what the majority of the workload there is dealing with. I don't think there is a clear understanding, as Mr. Fugate said this up-front, that what they are actually doing outside of just the immediate response, is not quite, I think, what people think.

Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS. Yes, and I thank you for that. You are correct, Mr. Currie, I am a physician, a military veteran, and I do come from a public health background as a State director. I found it unusual to have put FEMA in charge of vaccine and vaccine clinics. They don't have medical personnel. I can tell you my local public health agencies with whom I am in contact with, and I did vaccine clinics in all 24 counties, that, you know, they have the wherewithal and the knowledge to have been able to have done that and to have done that effectively without increased burden and costs to FEMA.

I also find it interesting and I am not sure how you all feel about it, but in processing, when I went to Quantico and learned about

the processing of Afghan refugees, all of the Afghan refugees get vaccinations for all childhood immunizations. They are COVID-19 tested and then they are offered the COVID-19 vaccine, but it is not mandatory. But yet, on our Southern Border, as you are processing and being required to help process people on the Southern Border, there is no COVID-19 testing. So, I am not sure if you feel, that the CBP feel, that they are put at risk that your agents are also put at risk in helping to manage those coming in our country either through Afghanistan or through the Southern Border. It is OK, you don't need to respond. Thank you, Madam Chair, I yield back.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. The gentlewoman yields back. The Chair now recognizes the Chair of the Subcommittee on Oversight, Management, and Accountability, the gentleman from California, Mr. Correa, for 5 minutes.

Chairman CORREA. Madam Chair, thank you very much. I want to thank our witnesses. Some excellent presentations. You know, I think of FEMA, I think of other Government agencies, esprit de corps, just serving because they believe in the mission. They believe in service for our country. They believe in saving people, rescuing people in the most dark time of crisis. They are veterans. You have a lot of veterans that join FEMA. You have a lot of service corps individuals. So, you have, I would say, a very envious work force that are there because they believe. So, given the challenges that you have, which you are overextended, multi-missioned. Sometimes you get controversy. Again, I just heard a minute ago that the locals just want to get their grants and please move on. But if you got a worker, he or she, coming in there with the best intentions, then they experience civil right violations, sexual harassment, it kind-of makes things a little difficult.

So, my question, and this is a general one for all of you. You can be brief in your answer, given that I only have a few moments here. What can we do to assure those individuals that are victimized that once they, you know, essentially blow the whistle, and turn somebody over, how can we make sure that those violators, those offenders are held accountable for their action? How can we give the incentive to let folks know if somebody wrongs you in this great gold-plated FEMA agency, we are going to take of you? Thank you.

Mr. FUGATE. Well, this is Craig. I think you really need to ask this of FEMA Administrator Criswell because I think she has taken the RAND study. She has implemented an action plan. She is doing things that I think get to your issue. They are publishing in their weekly newsletter to their employees those sexual harassment cases that are being disciplined. That has never been done before. Again, I think they are trying to bring a level of transparency that has never been done before. This won't be cured overnight. But the steps they are taking are concrete. They have asked RAND to come back and do multiple surveys. Not just do one and done. But to see if these steps they are taking is changing that culture so they can continue that feedback loop of making sure that when you come to FEMA, you are there to do your job, not deal with, as you point out, sir, the other issues, the harassment, just a lot of stuff that is just not tolerated in the organization. I think

the administrator has made that clear from her first day. Her approach to that is going to be very hands-on and very transparent.

Chairman CORREA. Thank you.

Ms. SIMS. Based on the recommendations from our study, we did say increasing accountability and transparency and make sure leadership at all levels, including those who are deployed, as we have heard, may not have the training that they need necessarily to begin to start. Make sure they have the training so that they know how to handle these kinds of things so that they can address them when they happen. FEMA I do think is doing a rolling-out the plan and implementing it over time. That is what it will take. It is simple, but it is not easy. It is something that will take a while.

Chairman CORREA. Usually, the simplest solutions are the toughest ones to implement. They are usually the most effective. Mr. Currie.

Mr. CURRIE. Yes, this requires cultural change, which takes time. But there are building blocks to cultural change. I mean, I have been encouraged to see some of the things that have happened recently. I agree that the way you solve this is not by burying it. They have been very transparent, very open, which is a very humble approach to this, which is necessary. But there is also very specific EEOC best practices that we have seen across Government that are done. For instance, they set up the Office of Professional Responsibility, which reports to the administrator. They are neutral. They are sort-of a third party within the agency. That was done to set up transparency and legitimacy to these harassment reviews. So, people don't see them as influenced by other managers.

So, there are lots of pieces to this. I think they are doing all the right things. We are just, you know, we are looking at it right now and I think we are just going to have to see what the impact of this is, you know, year 1 or 2 after these changes have been made.

Chairman CORREA. Let me just add that I think you are right, it is a cultural societal issue. It is not only one at FEMA, but I think society as a whole. We are trying to get there. So, all of us are working together. But again, our offer, as the Chair has said, if you need any help from us legislatively, please let us know. Thank you very much. Madam Chair, with that, I yield.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. The gentleman yields back. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey, Mr. Payne, for 5 minutes.

Mr. PAYNE. Am I muted?

Chairwoman DEMINGS. We can hear you. Mr. Payne?

Mr. PAYNE. Is that better? There we go.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Yes. We can hear you.

Mr. PAYNE. OK, thank you. Good morning, Mr. Fugate. It is good to see you again, been a little while. Let's see. In 2020, GAO released a report that discussed FEMA's staffing shortages in 2017 and 2018. A period when multiple hurricanes made landfall in less than a month. At the time, FEMA has to redeploy personnel from one disaster to the next. Mr. Fugate and Mr. Currie, what impact do these redeployments and lack of staffing have on FEMA's ability to carry out its mission? What impact does this have on employee morale and performance?

Mr. FUGATE. Well, I will start and it is good to see you, Congressman. When you looked at what FEMA had to do in 2017, with the 3 major hurricanes, and again in 2018, I was very familiar with that all the way back in Florida where I got hit by 4 hurricanes in one season. So, I know this from the local and State perspective, as well as the Federal perspective. You are always going to go and focus on the immediate response, life safety, the needs of the public, the individual assistance programs. Those get the highest priority, which means you are going to pull people from the recovery. So, what it does is it delays communities from recovering. It delays the funding that FEMA provides for communities to rebuild. It results in local governments and States having to borrow money because they can't get reimbursed fast enough. I know in Florida I talked to officials from Monroe County that were having to borrow money to pay for Hurricane Irma response because it took too long to reimburse for debris.

So, it really is FEMA taking what they have. It is always focused on life safety, the individual assistance, and immediate response at the expense of the recovery, which both cost the local communities, but ultimately the Federal taxpayer more money in overhead, administrative costs, mistakes, and delays, and recovery.

Mr. PAYNE. And the morale?

Mr. FUGATE. You know, again, I think the morale piece is when you can't get breaks. When you are just doing serial response and the same people are getting called out. I think that is one of the things Administrator Criswell on her first day when she talked to folks and said, look, we are busy, but when we can get down time, I want people to take some down time. We don't have to be at work every day, if you have that ability. The problem is, is disasters dictate that.

Another interesting thing is what I found in FEMA, and this was kind-of a number I was always fascinated with, we lost more people in the first 3 years of their employment at FEMA than at any other time frame. I am thinking a lot of it came about because they were there for the response phase. They didn't necessarily realize they had signed up for a grant phase of long-term recovery of sitting in offices processing paperwork. That wasn't what they thought they were signing up for. So, I think—

Mr. PAYNE. Got you.

Mr. FUGATE [continuing]. That is another challenge they face.

Mr. PAYNE. OK, thank you. Mr. Currie?

Mr. CURRIE. Yes, I mean, it is not just about numbers, Congressman Payne. I mean, if it was just about numbers, I think they would be doing pretty well. You know, they have hired what, 6,000 people over the last 5 years. They have got 22,000 people sort-of on staff. But I think there is a misconception that they are just all those people are waiting around for a disaster to happen then they deploy everyone. The truth is is that most of that work force is already committed to something else in one of those prior 1,000 disaster recoveries that are still going on. So, at any given time, they might have, you know, 30 to 40 percent of their work force actually able to be deployed when something actually happens.

So, it is not just things that are going to happen in the future. It is all the cumulative things that are still going on from the past,

and then you add on that what happened like in 2017, when you had 3 sequential hurricanes and the huge wildfires in the West. Then you are overwhelmed because you really only started with having 30 to 40 percent of your work force available.

So, I think we have got to figure something out where, you know, we are able to scale-up for those kind of situations in a much better way. I think it is the process issue of like what are all those people working on from past disaster recoveries? The grants, the paperwork, you know, there has got to be a way to streamline that so we can focus folks on what we want them to really be focused on.

Mr. PAYNE. Thank you. Madam Chair, I will yield back. Thank you.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Thank you so much. The gentleman yields back. I am going to recognize myself for additional questions. Mr. Currie, after Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico in 2017, one reason for the delays in disaster assistance was an insufficient number of bilingual FEMA employees. FEMA's guidance required all communications to be in Spanish, yet the agency did not have enough emergency responders who could meet the requirement. So, could you talk a little bit and I know everybody probably can clearly understand how important the cultural competency is to having an appropriate response, but just talk about some of the challenges in recruiting a bilingual work force.

Mr. CURRIE. It is a great question. The situation in Puerto Rico was so extreme just because of the bilingual needs there and the size of that disaster. So, there is no doubt they didn't have the capacity they needed to handle something like that when it happened. One of the things FEMA does is they, you know, they try to hire locally under the Stafford Act to address these challenges when they come up. They did that in Puerto Rico. They hired thousands of local folks, you know, for these missions. That is great to address this need. But the other challenge is is that these folks have no experience with FEMA programs or, you know, in some cases, emergency management.

So, you know, there are ways to try to address this challenge to help the linguistics issue. But it is also hard to just have, you know, a work force kind-of sitting around ready for any contingency that might happen. You know, in this country we have so many languages spoken. So, depending on where the disaster hits, it is really difficult to do that. So, again, it is this issue of are we ready to scale up or scale down when this is needed? There may be other things to look at besides only hiring folks that speak Spanish or other languages. Maybe there are other resources they could bring in from other agencies or partnerships where they can scale up when it is necessary.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Yes, thank you so much for that. You are correct, there are so many languages in our country, which is a beautiful thing. But I do think that Spanish is one of those prevalent languages in our country. Mr. Fugate, anything you would like to add to that?

Mr. FUGATE. Well, again, in Florida, we face language issues. It is not only Spanish. We have Creole languages. In New York City when we were dealing Superstorm Sandy, we had literally dozens of major languages that we were having to deal with. So, again,

what GAO says, we would hire local people to act as translators. It gives us several things. No. 1, they know the communities, they know the neighborhoods, they know a lot of the underlying issues. I think this is why a big part of what I pushed at FEMA was always hire local and buy local as much as you can to help the local economy.

I wouldn't expect the new hires in Puerto Rico to run the programs. What I would expect them to do is to be partnered with somebody at FEMA who knew the programs to then integrate that with the local officials, act as the translators. But also give them a better understanding of the context of what they are dealing with. I have always found that local people understand issues in a way that somebody coming from outside of that community just never grasp. So, that is why I put it a big premium. But it has got to be done in a way that it is subject-matter experts tied with that local hire to be effective. It can't just be a hire the local person and turn them loose and expect the programs to be administered.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Do either of you know of any adjustments that were made? Mr. Currie, you are absolutely correct. Puerto Rico did provide some unique challenges. I had an opportunity to visit the island in 2017, with a Congressional delegation. You know, once you experience the challenges in terms of the language barriers, the lack of bilingual employees, were there any adjustments that were made or recommendations that were made to prepare for the next time?

Mr. CURRIE. Yes, and I too, I have been there 5 times since Hurricane Maria as well. I have gotten to understand the situation pretty well. I think the bottom line is right now, I think they are really well-prepared for something that is going to happen because they have so many people they have hired locally. A lot of those people have converted over to full-time or reserve or CORE positions and gone to other parts of the country or stayed there in Puerto Rico are now managing the program and they have the experience. So, I think their capacity level is really high in terms of preparedness to deal with something else.

Now, honestly, it has taken 4 years to get there. It was a struggle and it was not pretty the first couple years. It has gotten better. So, I think they are in pretty good shape to handle, you know, response to disasters that may happen. I think the challenge in Puerto Rico has more to do with the financial situation of the recovery and the funding that is necessary to rebuild all the damaged infrastructure because they haven't even really, you know, started to tackle the long-term projects yet. A lot of that has to do with the financial condition of Puerto Rico.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Thank you so much for that. Ms. Sims, anything at all that you would like to add to this particular question?

Ms. SIMS. No, thank you.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. OK, thank you. Mr. Fugate, last year the union that represents FEMA, the American Federation of Government Employees, sent a letter to the incoming FEMA administrator, which highlighted that the FEMA work force were comprised of only 5,000 full-time employees out of 26,000, roughly, total employees. Over the past few years, we have witnessed nu-

merous disasters including hurricanes, floods, fires, tornadoes, and, of course, the COVID-19 pandemic. With year-round disasters, we need year-round employees who can respond to those disasters. Could you talk a little bit, would it benefit or how would it benefit FEMA to change the composition of its work force to hire more permanent, full-time employees? Or do you believe that there should be a significant contingency of part-time employees as well to be able to fulfill the mission?

Mr. FUGATE. I think you are going to have to have all of that but the ratios are wrong. I think you need to go back to—originally FEMA deployed permanent work force as the primary disaster responders. The problem was they were staying out so long, the other work wasn't getting done. That really created this move toward almost all disasters being handled by the nonpermanent work force with the permanent work force not deploying.

When I got to FEMA, it turned out there was people in the permanent work force that didn't even have emergency functions in their position descriptions and legally, couldn't be deployed against their will. Even though FEMA requires every employee, now, to do that. When I got there even though the statement said you are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week deployed, the vast majority of FEMA staff had never been deployed and were not allowed to deploy or it wasn't in their position description. We changed that. But I think it is important that people that, in my experience, was when the FEMA folks deployed, the permanent work force, it not only gave us additional personnel in the field, it was more important to the overall FEMA's mission because they got to see the things they were administrating at headquarters in the field and understand what the challenges were. It made them better, including our—what was interesting was our grants people. As you pointed out, all the funding that FEMA provides through the grants program, the Homeland Security grants and the, you know, the funding there to help build preparedness. It was amazing that the grants people had never seen the outcome of their work. When they went to Superstorm Sandy, they saw all that equipment and all that capability for the first time deployed and they were going, I never realized we had that big of an impact. I said that response wouldn't have occurred without the funding you administered.

So, I think the permanent work force needs to be part of disaster response. It needs to be built into their DNA. We must be able to continue the existing work. So, I think we need to grow that permanent work force. We need to make it where they do deploy more frequently so they have that connection between their mission and what is done in the field. But also balance that with there is no way to have that big of a work force that may not have a lot of disasters to go to using the CORE and the reserve work force to be a balanced response. So, we have surge work force capabilities, but we also are not excluding the permanent work force from being part of the disaster response team.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. You know, Mr. Fugate, I was hoping that the Chair of the full committee was going to be able to join us today. He is not. So, the question is: When you testified before the committee in October 2015, Chairman Thompson asked whether our disaster response work force was as robust as it would need to

be to respond to a disaster on the scale of Hurricane Katrina as we talk about work force numbers. At the time, you told the committee that we are not there. In 2019, Chairman Thompson asked then FEMA Administrator Gaynor a similar question. He responded that FEMA had a deficit of a few thousand. We keep hearing time and time again that FEMA does not have enough staff and we have also talked about some of the challenges for that. What do we need to do or how can we help FEMA to be better able to recruit, and sometimes that is the easy part, but to retain more employees?

Mr. FUGATE. Well, my experience tells me that people that are attracted to FEMA, who don't really understand FEMA, are attracted to what they see as the response role. It turns out the response role is one of the things that most people at FEMA and the permanent full-time jobs do the least of. So, there is often a mismatch between expectations and reality. I think we need to do a better job of doing that. But I also think we need to provide to the permanent work force more opportunities to be in disaster response without necessarily taking away from the day-to-day mission, which means better staff, more staff, and more flexibility there.

But I think the last piece goes back to the Reserve work force. If we expect to have well-trained quality folks, we have to do something besides only dealing with it when we employ them in a disaster. This is something that Congress needs to look at. Provide FEMA the authority through Stafford Act funds, to train Reservists not tied to a disaster so that they get minimal training on a reoccurring basis to improve retention and make better-trained Reservists before they are deployed. Also, look at other incentives that the military reserve has to protect those people who may come off of existing jobs to help in disasters so that we can attract the best quality folks, best retention, and good benefits.

But I think just one thing, if you just got the Stafford Act amended where FEMA could train Reservists not tied to a disaster response, but out of what they generally refer to as the DSR surge account, so that it would be a reoccurring training. Including things like harassment training, which turns out a lot of these folks don't have any of that until they show up at the job site and then that is hard to get as a priority when you are dealing with everything you are faced in the first 30 days of a disaster. But I think this is one thing that would help. Clarify and give FEMA the authority to use the funding in the disaster relief fund to train Reservists outside of being deployed to a specific disaster.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Thank you so much for that. I do ask unanimous consent to submit into the record a letter from the American Federation of Government Employees. So moved.

[The information follows:]

LETTER FROM THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO
(AFGE)*January 19, 2022.*

The Honorable VAL DEMINGS,
*Chairwoman, Emergency Preparedness, Response, & Recovery Subcommittee, House
Homeland Security Committee, H2-176 Ford House Office Building, Wash-
ington, DC 20515.*

The Honorable KAT CAMMACK,
*Ranking Member, Emergency Preparedness, Response, & Recovery Subcommittee,
House Homeland Security Committee, H2-176 Ford House Office Building,
Washington, DC 20515.*

The Honorable LOU CORREA,
*Chairman, Oversight, Management, & Accountability Subcommittee, House Home-
land Security Committee, H2-176 Ford House Office Building, Washington, DC
20515.*

The Honorable PETER MELJER,
*Ranking Member, Oversight, Management, & Accountability Subcommittee, House
Homeland Security Committee, H2-176 Ford House Office Building, Wash-
ington, DC 20515.*

DEAR CHAIRS THOMPSON, DEMINGS, AND CORREA, RANKING MEMBERS KATKO, CAMMACK, MELJER AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEES: On behalf of the American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO (AFGE), which represents more than 700,000 Federal and District of Columbia government employees, including 5,000 within the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), we appreciate the subcommittee addressing how FEMA can build a workforce prepared and ready to respond to National disasters. We thank you for your support of a strong Federal emergency management program and your recognition of the importance of a professional, apolitical civil service supporting the American public during natural disasters.

Our country has been devastated by one of the most active disaster seasons in recent memory. FEMA employees have responded to hundreds of disasters, including the COVID-19 pandemic, wildfires, hurricanes, tornadoes, and record flooding. FEMA employees work to make victims whole again after natural and human-created disasters. FEMA first responders stay on the ground sometimes for months or years to ensure that the Americans affected by natural and human-made disasters can return to normalcy and rebuild their lives. FEMA urban search-and-rescue teams extricate survivors and victims from burning cars and flooded homes. FEMA safety officers ensure downed power lines do not electrocute survivors and hazardous substances in flood waters do not sicken communities. FEMA firefighters and police officers work hand-in-hand with State and local emergency management agencies to suppress fires and prevent crime. FEMA claims adjusters work to compensate victims after their homes have been destroyed. FEMA logisticians compile data and predict when and where future disasters will occur and how to prevent them. FEMA grant and contracting officers ensure community needs are met in the aftermath of destruction.

Most FEMA employees are non-permanent. Out of a workforce of more than 20,000 total employees, only about 5,000 are full-time permanent employees. FEMA employees are over-worked, under-resourced, and frequently deployed to multiple disaster zones without adequate recuperation time.

In 1988 the Stafford Act created two sets of non-permanent employees to be hired during disasters, including (1) Cadre of On-Call Recovery/Response Employees (CORE) and (2) Disaster Response Workers (DRW) Temporary Workers. CORE and DRW employees are brought on using an expedited hiring process during disasters. For the purposes of this letter, CORE and DRW employees will be referred to as Stafford Act employees.

Although Stafford Act employees were intended to supplement permanent employees during short-term disasters, in practice Stafford Act employees often serve for much longer than the 2- to 4-year periods specified in their contracts, sometimes for 10 years or more. The excessive use of Stafford Act hiring results in permanent FEMA staff positions going unfilled for extended periods.

Stafford Act employees should be deployed to disaster zones for specified time periods to respond to specific disasters. These positions were not designed to assist or replace permanent full-time employees for non-disaster work. However, this frequently occurs because of permanent staff vacancies within FEMA, with Stafford Act employees performing work outside of their job descriptions. The excessive use of Stafford Act employees means that personnel are constantly being shifted from

one disaster site to the next, harming retention and recruitment efforts, the inevitable result of grueling hours and low morale.

Instead, FEMA should hire more permanent full-time employees who are emergency management, safety, and program management professionals with appropriate skills and expertise. Such action will benefit the agency and its employees, including qualified Stafford Act employees who could transition into appropriate permanent positions.

In contrast to full-time or temporary Title 5 employees, Stafford Act employees lack civil service rights and protections that help to improve workplace safety, labor-management relations, and communication, and to prevent harassment and discrimination in the workplace. When Stafford Act employees experience discrimination, harassment, or other inappropriate treatment, they have few avenues for pursuing remedies. Without union representation, Stafford Act employees lack effective mechanisms for reporting, resolving, or de-escalating workplace conflicts and grievances.

Following a high-profile harassment case involving a FEMA senior executive in 2018, a study by the RAND Corporation revealed that 29 percent of FEMA employees experienced a civil rights violation during a single year. Fewer than half of these employees formally reported these incidents to management, fearing in part that nothing would be done. A more recent Department of Homeland Security OIG report from September 2021 found that one-third of employees had experienced sexual harassment or misconduct but did not report it, believing that the incidents would not be properly investigated. The OIG found that FEMA had a fragmentary record for investigating and taking corrective action in some 305 cases of harassment and misconduct that were reported to agency officials. The agency's 2021 Culture Improvement Action Plan has several laudable goals, which will be much more easily achieved if the agency transitions away from the excessive use of non-permanent employees who have completely inadequate workplace protections.

FEMA's workload is constantly increasing, as the Nation faces an unprecedented onslaught of disasters. For FEMA to succeed, it is critical that Congress and the Administration prioritize hiring more full-time permanent Title 5 employees. If they do so, FEMA will be a stronger, more agile, and responsive agency in protecting the American public from national disasters.

Sincerely,

JULIE N. TIPPENS,

Director, Legislative Political and Mobilization Department.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Thank you, Mr. Fugate. You spoke about harassment. Ms. Sims, the RAND 2020 Report highlights several challenges—I think we talked a little bit about those—FEMA faces in the effort to create a more inclusive work force, including barriers that can prevent employees from reporting incidents of harassment and discrimination. Can you describe just some of the barriers while conducting your survey, if there were any, with FEMA employees?

Ms. SIMS. So, I guess I would say having the reserve work force as it was, was not necessarily a barrier, but it was a challenge, right? Because obviously, they are a huge part of what FEMA does and we definitely wanted to get their perspective, especially since there was some indication that possibly during deployments, they might experience challenges there. So, you know, it was key to get a good estimate of prevalence across the organization to be able to recruit them.

Now, FEMA did help us out during the course of the survey. They sent an email through their system, their DTS system, to FEMA Reservists so that they could know to check their FEMA email. Because we sent the invitations with unique links to FEMA employees in emails. But it was interesting, you know, we worked with FEMA to try and get Reservists paid to take the survey because they are doing FEMA's work when they are taking the survey, right? They are helping FEMA understand what their experience was. That was a challenge because there was no functionality

in the sense of if they were paid, if they claimed that time, then FEMA would know they took the survey and we were also trying to protect their confidentiality. So, there are some tricky things there with the reserve work force.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. OK. Thank you so very much. Mr. Currie or Mr. Fugate, anything you would like to add to, you know, how we can better interact with the FEMA employees because of the large numbers and the Reservist status to get the information that we need? Mr. Sims.

Ms. SIMS. Ms. Sims or Mr. Currie?

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Oh, I am sorry. I am sorry. Mr. Currie.

Mr. CURRIE. Sorry. No, I agree. I think this—you can probably hear this issue of how do you pay and train your intermittent work force is a challenge. You know, I am not—I think the military analogy is somewhat useful. I mean, I don't want to say that system is perfect, but you know, back when the Reservists in the National Guard employee flexibilities and titles were developed, it was to address this same issue. You know, how do we—we have our permanent military and but how do we scale up when we have a need? That includes not just hiring people and training people, but how do you deploy them given their specific skill sets? Very similar at FEMA. I mean, I think we need a relook at this whole system. There has been some things done. I mean, for example, the DRRRA bill back in 2018, gave FEMA flexibility to more easily convert CORE and Reservists to full-time positions, without having to re go through the whole Federal hiring process, which is not easy. So, I mean, there has been some things around the margins. But, I mean, you have got to look at this in totality from hiring to onboarding to training to retention.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Mr. Fugate.

Mr. FUGATE. Yes, some of this is going to require a lot of work. I think the simplest thing is to—and this can be done in the budget process. So, as we are working on the next budget, this is really a simple fix if you can get people to agree to it. Give FEMA the authority to pay for Reservists outside of them being deployed to a disaster. So, if they already have that 2 days a month and 2 weeks a year if they are not deployed, they get training, the things like these surveys don't become an issue of trying to get people to take a survey, yet risk identifying them because they are getting paid.

It also goes back to better retention. This is something we can do right now. You have this in the budget process. It would be an addition to the authorizing language, the appropriations language, to give FEMA the ability to do this. I don't think this would require new funding. I think you fund the disaster relief fund at adequate levels, you are going to have to do some additional adjustments based upon the level of disasters. But I don't think this is a huge challenge of new money that has to be found, new authority that has to be found. It just needs to clarify that FEMA has the authority to use the relief fund to train Reservists outside of a specific disaster.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Thank you so much. The Chair will now recognize the gentlewoman from Nevada, Ms. Titus, for 5 minutes.

Ms. TITUS. Well, thank you so much. Mr. Currie, over the past year, FEMA has placed COVID-19 surge response teams in my district, and they have been going door-to-door canvassing efforts to try to increase vaccination rates. I represent one of the most diverse districts in the country and I wonder if you could address whether FEMA makes any attempt to send people who match the neighborhood so that they can be more effective. Also, since the Biden administration has highlighted diversity as one of the goals for FEMA, how can you all reach out to better hire a diverse work force that looks like the people in my community?

Mr. CURRIE. Yes, ma'am, thank you. So, based on the work that we have done evaluating FEMA, I mean, we know that they do attempt at the regional level to deploy people that have the background of that area and speak the language if that is necessary to try to better connect with those communities. They absolutely do that. I don't have data with me on how well they do that or any metrics, but I do know that is a priority.

On the hiring side, I think at FEMA, and not just at FEMA, but at DHS, I mean, they take hiring through the lens of diversity very seriously. I have seen their human capital monitoring and metrics, which, you know, where they monitor by gender, by race, by ethnicity, by language, by veteran status, you know, who they hire, who they retain. I mean, there is a lot of focus on that right now. I think even more so over the last year as the Executive Orders have come out about, you know, trying to promote additional diversity in the Federal work force.

Ms. TITUS. Do you know if you have reached to the historical Black colleges or minority-serving institutions as part of the recruiting process?

Mr. CURRIE. No, ma'am, I don't know if FEMA has done that because we haven't looked at that.

Ms. TITUS. Well, I think that would be a good idea. That would be a way to attract some bright young people and get some diversity at the same time. Speaking of young people, tell me about the FEMA Corps that is that service program between FEMA and AmeriCorps that is trying to recruit young people to get engaged when they are—before they are ready for a job to perhaps learn the ropes and then choose that as a career.

Mr. CURRIE. Yes, no, and this is something that at GAO we looked at this right after Hurricane Sandy, when FEMA Corps was first rolled out. I know when it first came out, they were trying to have this be, you know, a force of several thousand young persons who could help them surge in the case of a major disaster. We saw that they did that. I think the challenge that we saw with the surge there—or the FEMA Corps was just, you know, plugging them into an existing complicated process too. I mean, there were a lot of things that they can do in the immediate response. Things like helping, you know, go door-to-door, get people information, talk to survivors, those types of things. But when it came down to some of the more technical processes that are involved in response and recovery, they may not have had the training that was necessary to do that. So, I think it was hard for FEMA field leaders who we talked to to plug them in where it was necessary.

Ms. TITUS. Well, maybe we ought to look at that training program and try to help fill some of these vacancies. Also, there might be some additional incentives to attract people to the program and then they will stay in FEMA for a career.

Mr. CURRIE. Yes, ma'am. I know that was the goal. We haven't looked at it again over the last 5 years or so. But what we have seen over time is the numbers of FEMA Corps kind-of go down. I am not sure what the exact numbers now. I think it is in the hundreds. It seems like they have gotten a little bit away from using FEMA Corps in their response efforts.

Ms. TITUS. Well, we are talking about a Climate Corps, and I think a FEMA Corps is a good thing and we want to attract the best and brightest, get people interested in these jobs at a early age. So, we might want to revisit that and see how we can bump it up some. Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Thank you so much. The gentlewoman yields back. With that I want to thank our witnesses for your valuable testimony today. Of course, we did not anticipate the change in our vote schedule. Votes were called in the middle of our hearing. But we were able to get through it. I thank you so much for your patience. I also thank the Members of both subcommittees who participated today in this very important discussion. I look forward to working with our panelists on some of the issues that we discussed here today.

The Members of the subcommittees may have additional questions for the witnesses and we ask that you respond expeditiously in writing to those questions. The Chair reminds Members that the subcommittees' record will remain open for 10 business days. Without objection, the subcommittees stand adjourned. Thank you all.

[Whereupon, at 11:28 p.m., the subcommittees were adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

QUESTIONS FROM RANKING MEMBER JOHN KATKO FOR W. CRAIG FUGATE

Question 1. In your opinion, what steps should FEMA be taking to effectively balance and respond to these priorities?

Answer. I would defer to FEMA Administrator Criswell on how she is approaching this issue. I would note however that FEMA is asked to do many things because they have capabilities that are needed by other Federal agencies or the Nation. This is a good thing if FEMA is resourced to do the work. If not, then who else is going to do it?

Question 2. During a Transportation and Infrastructure hearing last year, Administrator Criswell noted “many of our staff have been activated in support of COVID-19 response operations and numerous other disaster declarations for over a year” How is employee morale and job performance impacted when response personnel are continually redeployed from one disaster to the next?

Answer. My experience is that FEMA morale is highest when FEMA staff are in direct support to communities in a crisis. The challenge in longer-term recovery operations where FEMA staff are pulled from to go to the next disaster response.

Question 3. We understand that it takes a village to get people back on their feet after their homes have been struck by disaster. After the December tornadoes that wreaked havoc across 6 States, we were proud of the FEMA emergency responders who quickly mobilized to lend a helping hand. In your experience, what measures does FEMA take not only to quickly mobilize a massive workforce in response to disaster, but also to ensure that qualified staff are being deployed to sites?

Answer. As noted in my written testimony, the lack of on-going training for FEMA Reservist outside of disaster deployments and limited benefits results in high staff turn-over and limited training for their disaster mission.

Question 4a. The RAND report found that almost 30 percent of FEMA’s workforce experienced a sex- or race-based rights violation in 2019. Although this report was after your time at FEMA, the issue at FEMA is likely not new. In your tenure at FEMA, what measures did you take to ensure a safe work environment, free to sex- or race-based violations?

Answer. Some of the steps we took were to increase funding for the FEMA Equal Employment Opportunity Office to address a backlog of discrimination cases, some dating back to the Hurricane Katrina response. We increased training for front-line supervisors.

Question 4b. Could you please describe the specific types of trainings FEMA leadership, versus employees and supervisors, underwent to reduce the occurrence of workplace harassment and discrimination based on sex, gender, race, or ethnicity?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 5a. Does FEMA’s current hiring process hinder their ability to address staffing shortages?

Question 5b. If so, how? Specifically, what parts of the process are limiting FEMA’s ability to hire the people the agency needs and what can be done moving forward?

Question 5c. Does FEMA need additional hiring authorities to address staffing shortages?

Answer. The answers to the above are complex and are better addressed by the current administration. The one that I would like to comment on is the FEMA Reserve Workforce. Reservist at FEMA are not the equivalent of the military Reservist who are covered under the Uniformed Services Employment and Re-Employment Rights Act. Rather FEMA Reservist are considered on-call who work intermittently with little benefits when not deployed. They have no protections if they have full-time employment when called up.

Hiring and maintaining FEMA Reservists is a continuous process. As the work is on-call, and intermittent, attracting talent in tight job markets is a challenge.

Without incentives to recruit and maintain Reservists, this workforce will continue to be a staffing challenge for current and future disasters.

Improve benefits and retention of the Reservist workforce

1. Provide all Reservist with a minimum of 2 days a month and 2 weeks a year of paid training if not deployed in that fiscal year for at least 30 days.
2. Consider adding the FEMA Reservist workforce to the Uniformed Services Employment and Re-Employment Rights Act or provide similar protections under the Stafford Act.
3. Continue to improve the implementation of Disaster Reform and Recovery Act (DRRA) where CORE and Reservists can compete for PFT positions at FEMA under Merit Promotion after 3 or more years of continuous work.

QUESTION FROM HONORABLE DIANA HARSHBARGER FOR W. CRAIG FUGATE

Question. In your view, would awarding FEMA contracts to contractors physically located near disaster sites produce favorable outcomes both by expediting the process of getting boots on the ground and by providing work to residents affected by the disaster? Should FEMA consider updating their contracting processes to prioritize contractors located near the disaster site?

Answer. Yes, my time as administrator, I urged that we buy local and hire local to help the local economy in the aftermath of a disaster. We supported that process by deploying purchasing staff to help local businesses navigate Federal contracts and to directly purchase goods and services from the communities in the disaster zone. Local hiring is another tool to put people to work that are displaced by the disaster.

QUESTIONS FROM HONORABLE PETER MELJER FOR W. CRAIG FUGATE

Question 1. GAO has reported that FEMA workforce issues are long-standing and are often at the core of other FEMA operational challenges. Considering this, when you were at FEMA, did FEMA ever consider a significant overhaul, or reboot of how it manages its workforce?

Answer. The first item we implemented was the requirement that all full-time staff have an emergency job in addition to their full-time position. This gives FEMA employees the chance to deploy to disasters in the immediate aftermath.

The second was to equip full-time staff with laptops and cell phone to work remotely when necessary.

The third item failed. We attempted to provide minimum training and hours to FEMA Reservist (part-time, on-call) consisting of 2 days a month and 2 weeks a year in not deployed to a disaster in the recent past. Due to how the Reservist are funded, we were unable to provide training outside of a disaster deployment.

Question 2. Given the challenges the FEMA workforce has faced over the past few years, such as staff shortages and burn-out, what is the most critical step FEMA should take to ensure it can respond adequately to hurricanes and wildfires in 2022? Could you tell us, to your own knowledge, if FEMA has implemented this action?

Answer. FEMA staff, both full-time and the Reservist have always been there to respond to the next disaster. The shortfall is in the recovery workforce.

QUESTIONS FROM CHAIRWOMAN VAL DEMINGS FOR CHRISTOPHER P. CURRIE

Question 1. Developing and maintaining a high-performing workforce is a top priority for the Department of Homeland Security and several DHS components have developed innovative solutions for attracting and retaining new and diverse employees. For example, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency is leveraging the newly-launched Cybersecurity Talent Management System to better recruit and retain cyber talent. Similarly, Customs and Border Protection announced the launch of the CBP Applicant Portal to provide a centralized location for applicants to receive tailored information on their application status. What lessons can FEMA learn and apply to its workforce development efforts from these and other DHS components?

Answer. Our body of work on strategic human capital management has highlighted strategies that can help agencies better manage the current and future workforce, including managing the timing of recruitment, writing user-friendly vacancy announcements, leveraging available hiring and pay flexibilities, increasing

support for an inclusive work environment, and encouraging rotations and other mobility opportunities.¹

We have not yet examined the Cybersecurity Talent Management System or the CBP Applicant Portal to identify lessons learned. Both of these efforts are relatively new, and once they have been in place long enough for CBP and DHS to identify lessons learned, DHS's Human Capital Leadership Council, which consists of Department-wide human capital leaders, can provide a forum through which FEMA's human capital leaders could learn about the benefits and challenges of these new approaches.

Additionally, FEMA could take additional steps to implement one of our recommendations related to workforce development. Specifically, in May 2020, we recommended that FEMA should create a staff development program for FEMA's disaster workforce that, at a minimum, addresses access to training, delivery of on-the-job training and mentoring, use of performance evaluations, and consistent developmental opportunities regardless of deployment status.² As discussed in greater detail below, FEMA has taken steps in response to this recommendation to improve staff development, but further action is needed to create an integrated and cohesive program to develop its disaster workforce.³

Question 2. The Biden administration's 2022–2026 FEMA Strategic Plan identifies increased efforts to recruit from a wider variety of locations and backgrounds as key to the development of a diverse workforce. What can FEMA do to recruit and engage with potential candidates from underrepresented communities?

Answer. Leading practices for human capital management, specifically for diversity management, include having a recruitment process for attracting a supply of qualified, diverse applicants for employment.⁴ For example, to ensure that agencies are reaching out to diverse pools of talent, they can widen the selection of schools from which they recruit to include, for example, historically Black colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, and women's colleges. Agencies may also want to consider partnering with multicultural professional organizations and speaking at their conferences to communicate their commitment to diversity to external audiences and strengthen and maintain relationships. We have reported on the extent to which other Federal agencies have implemented recruitment strategies to attract qualified, diverse applicants for employment.⁵

FEMA's Strategic Plan states that FEMA will partner with Historically Black Colleges and Universities and the American Indian Higher Education Consortium of Tribal Colleges and Universities to create hiring pipelines into the field of emergency management. We recently initiated work on FEMA's hiring process and staffing shortages and the impact these shortages might have on disaster response efforts. As part of this work, we will be examining FEMA's hiring initiatives, which could include targeting candidates from underrepresented communities for recruitment.

QUESTIONS FROM HONORABLE DINA TITUS FOR CHRISTOPHER P. CURRIE

Question 1a. Following the release of RAND's report on harassment and discrimination in the FEMA workforce, FEMA released a Culture Improvement Action Plan, which details several steps it plans to take to address RAND's report's findings and recommendations. At the request of this committee, GAO is performing a review of FEMA's implementation of this action plan.

What actions has FEMA taken thus far to implement this plan?

Answer. As part of our on-going work, at the request of Chairman Thompson, we are identifying what actions FEMA has taken since fiscal year 2019 to prevent and respond to harassment and discrimination in the workplace. Some of these actions detailed in the Culture Improvement Action Plan involve offering additional train-

¹ GAO, *Human Capital: Improving Federal Recruiting and Hiring Efforts*, GAO-19-696T (Washington, DC: July 30, 2019).

² GAO, *FEMA Disaster Workforce: Actions Needed to Address Deployment and Staff Development Challenges*, GAO-20-360 (Washington, DC: May 4, 2020).

³ FEMA's steps to respond to this recommendation are detailed in response to a subsequent question in this enclosure and are also detailed on GAO's website at <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-360>.

⁴ GAO, *Diversity Management: Expert-Identified Leading Practices and Agency Examples*, GAO-05-90 (Washington, DC: Jan. 14, 2005). See also <https://www.gao.gov/leading-practices-human-capital-management> for more details on our leading practices for human capital management.

⁵ For example, see GAO, *Army Corps of Engineers: Workforce Planning Follows Most Leading Practices but Could Be Enhanced with Additional Actions*, GAO-22-104054 (Washington, DC: Dec. 9, 2021) and GAO, *Intelligence Community: Additional Actions Needed to Strengthen Workforce Diversity Planning and Oversight*, GAO-21-83 (Washington, DC: Dec. 17, 2020).

ing—including sexual misconduct awareness and response training at Joint Field Offices as well as civil treatment training for employees and supervisors—and increasing engagement between FEMA workforce and agency leadership by hosting all-staff Town Halls and listening sessions between leadership and FEMA Employee Resource Groups.

Additionally, in 2019, FEMA restructured its processes to respond to allegations of harassment by establishing the Office of Professional Responsibility. The Office of Professional Responsibility is responsible for investigating reports of employee misconduct, including harassment. In 2021, FEMA adopted an anti-harassment program instruction, which guides the agency's response to harassment for any FEMA employee, contractor, vendor, applicant, or individual that comes into contact with FEMA employees.

Question 1b. What reaction has the FEMA community had to these actions?

Answer. As part of our on-going work, we are meeting with each of FEMA's 10 Employee Resource Groups to obtain their perspectives on FEMA's actions to address harassment and discrimination since RAND published its report, *Harassment and Discrimination on the Basis of Gender and Race/Ethnicity in the FEMA Workforce*. The 10 Employee Resource Groups represent a variety of employee identities, including African American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian American-Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, LGBTQIA, military veterans, National service alumni, women, older employees, and employees with disabilities.

We expect to publish our report on this topic in fall 2022.

In addition, FEMA contracted with RAND to conduct a follow-up survey in 2021. All FEMA employees were invited to participate in this survey, which included similar questions to the initial survey about the prevalence of workplace harassment and discrimination and perceptions of agency leadership. Results from this follow-up survey are expected in summer 2022.

QUESTIONS FROM RANKING MEMBER JOHN KATKO FOR CHRISTOPHER P. CURRIE

Question 1. In your opinion, what steps should FEMA be taking to effectively balance and respond to these priorities?

Answer. FEMA's disaster workforce will be in high demand for the foreseeable future.⁶ We have previously reported that the rising number and costs of disasters and the increasing reliance on the Federal Government for disaster assistance will likely continue to rise as the climate changes.⁷ Recently, as we mentioned in our January 2022 testimony statement, the increasing frequency of disasters and the additional responsibilities of responding to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, assisting at the Southwest Border, and resettling Afghan refugees have stretched the FEMA workforce in unprecedented ways.

To balance and respond to these and any future priorities, we believe that FEMA needs to review its workforce in a holistic manner and make progress on addressing some of its long-standing challenges. We have made numerous recommendations in prior reports designed to address FEMA workforce challenges. As discussed in greater detail below in response to your third question, in our May 2020 report on FEMA's disaster workforce, we made 3 recommendations, 2 of which we designated as priority recommendations for DHS, meaning we believe they warrant priority attention and can substantially improve or transform major Government programs or agencies.⁸ Although FEMA has taken some steps to implement these 2 priority recommendations, it has not yet fully addressed them.

Through coordination with key Governmental and non-Governmental partners and collaboration on crosscutting efforts to improve program management and operations, FEMA could also help ensure that its available workforce can achieve greater results. We also have on-going work examining the coordination of Federal disaster programs, in which FEMA, as the Federal agency with primary responsibility for coordinating disaster response across approximately 30 other agencies, plays a vital role. As part of that work, we will be examining the design and implementation of some of FEMA's programs—specifically Public Assistance and Hazard Mitigation—to assess the extent to which they facilitate or hinder a coordinated approach to disaster recovery. We will also be examining what actions Congress or Federal agencies could take to provide for a more efficient and coordinated Federal

⁶ GAO-20-360.

⁷ GAO, *Climate Change: Information on Potential Economic Effects Could Help Guide Federal Efforts to Reduce Fiscal Exposure*, GAO-17-720 (Washington, DC: Sept. 28, 2017).

⁸ GAO-20-360 and GAO, *Priority Open Recommendations: Department of Homeland Security*, GAO-21-377PR (Washington, DC: Aug. 13, 2021).

approach to disaster recovery and post-disaster investments in resilience. We expect to report on this work in late 2022.

Question 2. During a Transportation and Infrastructure hearing last year, Administrator Criswell noted “many of our staff have been activated in support of COVID-19 response operations and numerous other disaster declarations for over a year”. How is employee morale and job performance impacted when response personnel are continually redeployed from one disaster to the next?

Answer. We have not specifically examined how the frequency of deployments has affected employee morale or job performance. However, as we stated in our January 2022 testimony statement, staffing shortages, coupled with burn-out associated with the increased frequency of disasters and an expanded scope of responsibility over time, have the potential to negatively affect FEMA employees’ engagement and morale. For example, in May 2020, we reported that FEMA officials believe that fatigue from previous deployments to Hurricanes Harvey and Irma contributed a high rate of staff deployment declinations to respond to Hurricane Maria. Specifically, these officials cited that 48 percent of FEMA staff members who showed availability declined to deploy to respond to Hurricane Maria when requested to do so.⁹ In this May 2020 report, we recommended that FEMA develop mechanisms, including collecting relevant data, to assess how effectively FEMA’s disaster workforce was deployed to meet mission needs in the field. FEMA concurred with this recommendation. Implementing this recommendation, the status of which we discuss in response to your third question below, could help FEMA better understand the impact that continuing to deploy from one disaster to the next might have on the employee morale and job performance of response personnel.

We also reported in January 2021 that top leaders at DHS have stated that concerns with working conditions and workload have negatively affect employee morale and engagement.¹⁰ In that report, we found that DHS and each of its major components—including FEMA—face the same key drivers of employee engagement as the rest of the Federal Government. Among these key drivers of employee engagement is work-life balance. We have found improving employee engagement, including through strategies can give them more work-life balance, is important because engaged employees are more innovative, more productive, more committed to their employer and its mission, more satisfied, and less likely to leave.¹¹

Question 3. Given FEMA’s mounting mission sets, spanning from natural disaster response to assisting with the crisis at the Southwest Border and resettling Afghan refugees, it is imperative that the agency be able to resolve challenges to its workforce capacity. Could you please provide the committee with an update on the steps FEMA has taken to implement GAO’s recommendations?

Answer. In our May 2020 report on FEMA’s disaster workforce, we made three recommendations.¹² Although FEMA has taken some steps to implement our recommendations, it has not yet fully addressed them. A detailed status update is provided below for each recommendation. We designated Recommendations 1 and 2 as priority recommendations for DHS, meaning we believe they warrant priority attention and can substantially improve or transform major Government programs or agencies.¹³ We will continue to monitor FEMA’s on-going efforts.

- *Recommendation 1.*—The FEMA administrator should develop a plan—with time frames and milestones and input from field leadership—to address identified challenges that have hindered FEMA’s ability to provide reliable and complete information to field leaders and managers about staff knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Status.—DHS concurred with our recommendation. As of December 2021, according to FEMA officials, FEMA has taken steps to enhance the FEMA Qualification System’s coach-and-evaluator program to provide more oversight of the program and help ensure greater reliability for personnel who receive qualification status. For example, FEMA stated that it has implemented assessments that cadres can use to help ensure that coach-and-evaluators are effectively coaching disaster staff. FEMA also stated that it is facilitating virtual coach-and-evaluator deployments to maximize pairing opportunities and increase Position Task Book completion rates among staff who do not have available coach-and-evaluators to pair with in the Deployment Tracking System. In addition,

⁹ GAO-20-360.

¹⁰ GAO, *DHS Employee Morale: Some Improvements Made, but Additional Actions Needed to Strengthen Employee Engagement*, GAO-21-204 (Washington, DC: Jan. 12, 2021).

¹¹ GAO, *Federal Workforce: Key Talent Management Strategies for Agencies to Better Meet Their Missions*, GAO-19-181 (Washington, DC: Mar. 28, 2019).

¹² GAO-20-360.

¹³ GAO-21-377PR.

FEMA officials said that they conducted a listening session in April 2021 with field leadership to gather input on the FEMA Qualification System. As a result of this session, FEMA officials said that they have developed qualification plans for cadres, conducted a field leader training analysis, and standardized coach-and-evaluator selection and activity. While these are positive actions, in order to address the complex and interrelated challenges we identified in our report, it will be important for FEMA to take a comprehensive approach and develop a plan that considers solutions that may cut across multiple systems and processes.

- *Recommendation 2.*—The FEMA administrator should develop mechanisms, including collecting relevant data, to assess how effectively FEMA’s disaster workforce was deployed to meet mission needs in the field.

Status.—DHS concurred with our recommendation. As of December 2021, according to FEMA officials, the agency is making progress toward meeting the force structure targets it established in 2019 and has a process in place to modify the targets for certain cadres on an annual basis if needed. According to these officials, such modifications will be based in part on feedback they receive via continuous coordination with the field on how deployments are meeting mission needs. FEMA officials noted that this will help cadres improve staffing models to better reflect how many personnel are needed to meet field requirements, including how quickly those staff are needed to phase into disasters and for how long they are likely required to meet disasters of different scales and complexities. While implementing our recommendation could include similar inputs as this planning process, our recommendation is focused on FEMA systematically collecting feedback from field leadership and relevant data on the extent to which its deployment processes and decisions (e.g., number and timing of deployments) met field needs during disasters. In its December 2021 update, FEMA officials stated the Field Operations Division works closely with the National Preparedness Directorate, which routinely engages with both field leadership and staff, during and after disasters, to solicit feedback, conduct analyses of field staffing challenges, and provide specific recommendations to programs for improvements. Officials also stated that one of the directorate’s data collection priorities is disaster workforce staffing. To satisfy the conditions of this recommendation, FEMA will need to provide evidence that it has established mechanisms—including collecting relevant data—that would allow the agency to assess how effectively FEMA’s disaster workforce was deployed to meet mission needs.

- *Recommendation 3.*—The FEMA administrator should create a staff development program for FEMA’s disaster workforce that, at a minimum, addresses access to training, delivery of on-the-job training and mentoring, use of performance evaluations, and consistent developmental opportunities regardless of deployment status.

Status.—DHS concurred with our recommendation. FEMA has taken a number of steps to improve staff development. For example, to facilitate staff’s ability to take training outside of the requirements in their Position Task Books (e.g., refresher training, training related to their deployed responsibilities), FEMA stated that, in October 2020, it built a new mechanism into the Deployment Tracking System that allows cadre management to assign such training to employees so that they can register for these classes. FEMA officials noted that this will make training more accessible and allow staff to continuously improve their performance. Further, in its 2021 updates, FEMA stated that it has implemented assessments that cadres can use to help ensure that coach-and-evaluators are effectively coaching disaster staff. FEMA also stated that it plans to facilitate virtual coach-and-evaluator deployments to maximize pairing opportunities for staff who do not have available coach-and-evaluators to pair with in the Deployment Tracking System. In addition, FEMA has issued a Deployment Performance Evaluation Directive, which provides guidance to Temporary Duty Supervisors for conducting deployment performance reviews of disaster staff and addressing performance deficiencies. The deployment performance evaluations are recorded in the Deployment Tracking System and use the same core competencies as those for full-time staff. FEMA stated that these evaluations will be a key part of the Reservist Performance Management Program, which establishes a process for providing annual performance appraisals for Reservists and assisting them in maintaining and improving performance. We will continue to monitor FEMA’s actions to assess the extent to which these actions constitute an integrated and cohesive program to develop its disaster workforce.

Question 4. GAO reported that FEMA faced staffing shortages during the 2017 and 2018 disaster seasons, including shortages in its contracting workforce. Unfor-

tunately, since those two seasons, the prevalence of disasters does not seem to be slowing down. Have these shortages continued since that time, and if so, how has FEMA responded?

Answer. FEMA has steadily increased its total force numbers—including permanent full-time staff, Cadre of On-Call Response Employees (CORE), and Reservists—in recent years, however we have not specifically assessed to what extent these increases have kept pace with the demands on FEMA. In response to a request from Chairman Thompson and Subcommittee Chairwoman Demings, we have recently initiated a review to identify whether staffing shortages have persisted. This review will also include an in-depth examination of FEMA’s hiring processes and initiatives and will address actions FEMA has taken to ensure it has the workforce needed to meet its various missions.

Question 5. In 2020, GAO reported that FEMA does not adequately ensure staff development, such as providing training courses, on-the-job learning, coaching, and mentoring. This is especially true of Reservists, who make up a large percentage of FEMA’s disaster workforce. As FEMA continues to increase its workforce, how can it ensure that personnel are able to access timely and program-specific developmental opportunities—on the job and when not deployed?

Answer. In May 2020, we recommended that FEMA should create a staff development program for its disaster workforce that, at a minimum, addresses access to training, delivery of on-the-job training and mentoring, use of performance evaluations, and consistent developmental opportunities regardless of deployment status.¹⁴ DHS concurred with our recommendation, and the status of FEMA’s efforts to implement our recommendation is detailed in response to question 3 above.

QUESTION FROM HONORABLE DIANA HARSHBARGER FOR CHRISTOPHER P. CURRIE

Question. In your view, would awarding FEMA contracts to contractors physically located near disaster sites produce favorable outcomes both by expediting the process of getting boots on the ground and by providing work to residents affected by the disaster? Should FEMA consider updating their contracting processes to prioritize contractors located near the disaster site?

Answer. Awarding contracts to contractors located near disasters is an important concept supported by statute and regulation. Specifically, the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2007 (Post-Katrina Act) amended the Stafford Act to provide a contracting preference for local vendors.¹⁵ The Stafford Act, as amended, contains mechanisms to provide Federal assistance to affected communities in the aftermath of a major disaster and jump-start the local economy through the award of contracts to local businesses in the disaster area. The act states, among other things, that agencies shall provide a contracting preference, to the extent feasible and practicable, to organizations, firms, and individuals residing or doing business primarily in the area affected by the major disaster or emergency. To this end, agencies may, for example, set aside contract awards so that only vendors residing or primarily doing business in the declared disaster area are allowed to compete for an award. Further, contracts not awarded to local vendors after a major disaster, such as if it is not feasible or practical, shall be justified in writing in the contract file. After the enactment of the Post-Katrina Act, changes were made to the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) to implement provisions regarding the preference for local vendors when contracting for major disaster for emergency assistance activities.

Although the contracting preference for agencies using local vendors in the aftermath of a major disaster is clear in statute and regulation, our past work identified challenges with FEMA’s use of local vendors. However, FEMA has subsequently improved its guidance on these issues. Specifically, in September 2015 we found that some FEMA contracting officers were confused about how to define the area of a local area set-aside and we recommended that the FEMA administrator provide new or updated guidance to ensure contracting officers are aware of requirements concerning how to contract with local vendors.¹⁶ DHS concurred, and updated guidance to reiterate the requirements and clarify how to determine the geographic area of a local area set-aside. Subsequently, in April 2019 we found that FEMA officials accurately identified the set-aside area for 6 selected contracts awarded in response

¹⁴ GAO–20–360.

¹⁵ 42 U.S.C. § 5150.

¹⁶ GAO, *Disaster Contracting: FEMA Needs to Cohesively Manage Its Workforce and Fully Address Post-Katrina Reforms*, GAO–15–783 (Washington, DC: Sept. 29, 2015).

to Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria.¹⁷ Additionally, as of 2021, FEMA included information on requirements related to contracting with local vendors following a major disaster, in both guidance and training that they provide to contracting officers. Specifically, FEMA's 2020 Disaster Contracting Desk Guide and its disaster contract file verification toolkit—a checklist of steps for contracting officers to take prior to award—include requirements related to using local area set-asides or documenting why using a local business may not be feasible. Further, local area set-asides were included as a training topic in FEMA's annual disaster contracting webinar in 2020. Finally, FEMA included information on requirements related to contracting with local vendors and the disaster contract file verification toolkit in its recently published FEMA Acquisition Manual.

While FEMA has clarified in its guidance requirements related to contracting with local vendors following major disasters, limitations in Government-wide guidance on emergency acquisitions remain. In April 2019, we found that contracting and legal officials at FEMA and at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) were unsure what or how much information was sufficient to determine that an offeror qualifies as a "local firm" under the FAR.¹⁸ Further, we found that USACE and FEMA applied the FAR criteria that contracting officers may consider to determine whether an offeror resides or primarily does business in the set-aside area differently. We recommended that the administrator of the Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) provide additional clarification on how contracting officers should determine whether offerors reside or primarily do business in a disaster area for the purposes of a local area set-aside contract. OFPP concurred with the recommendation and identified the Emergency Acquisition Guide, which was last updated in 2011, as a vehicle to address the recommendation. As of May 2021 OFPP staff stated that the agency plans to update the Emergency Acquisition Guide to include information on how contracting officers should determine whether offerors reside or primarily do business in a disaster area, but did not provide a time line for doing so. Without clarifying guidance, contracting and legal officials will likely continue to have varying interpretations of the FAR criteria for determining that an offeror qualifies as a local firm, increasing the risk that an offeror may be considered local by some agencies, but not others.

QUESTIONS FROM HONORABLE PETER MELJER FOR CHRISTOPHER P. CURRIE

Question 1a. Mr. Currie, in May 2020, GAO published a report citing critical challenges to FEMA's disaster workforce. These challenges included staffing shortages, qualification concerns upon deployment, and a lack of development opportunities for staff. Could you please tell the committee what kind of risks these challenges pose to FEMA's mission sets?

Question 1b. Staff development plays a key role not only in ensuring disaster responses are properly staffed, but in retaining qualified staff for future response efforts. Could you please explain to the committee the current challenges FEMA is facing in implementing further staff development opportunities?

Answer. As we mentioned in our January 2022 testimony statement, staffing shortages, workforce qualification concerns upon deployment, and a lack of development opportunities for staff pose risks to FEMA being able to achieve its mission of helping people before, during, and after disasters. Regarding risks posed by staffing shortages, with an increase in the frequency and cost of disasters, and with FEMA simultaneously supporting numerous efforts outside of its normal core responsibilities, we are concerned that FEMA personnel may not be prepared to manage a catastrophic natural disaster or concurrent disasters. As for qualification concerns upon deployment, FEMA planning managers noted that having staff inaccurately designated as qualified in FEMA's qualification system hindered FEMA's ability to support mission needs and affected morale by adding to others' workload. Finally, consistent and effective staff development is particularly important to help build the skills of staff who are qualified in the FEMA qualification system but unable to proficiently perform their duties and develop the large number of staff that FEMA has recently hired to meet its new disaster workforce targets.

Regarding current challenges FEMA is facing in implementing further staff development opportunities, we recommended in May 2020 that FEMA create a staff development program for its disaster workforce.¹⁹ This staff development program should, at a minimum, address access to training, delivery of on-the-job training and

¹⁷ GAO, *2017 Disaster Contracting: Actions Needed to Improve the Use of Post-Disaster Contracts to Support Response and Recovery*, GAO-19-281 (Washington, DC: Apr. 24, 2019).

¹⁸ GAO-19-281.

¹⁹ GAO-20-360.

mentoring, use of performance evaluations, and developmental opportunities. Such a program would help FEMA ensure more consistent and comprehensive development of the skills and abilities needed during deployments. FEMA has taken a number of steps in response to this recommendation, as detailed in response to Ranking Member John Katko's third question, and we will continue to monitor FEMA's actions to assess the extent to which these actions constitute an integrated and cohesive program to develop its disaster workforce.²⁰

Question 2. Given the challenges the FEMA workforce has faced over the past few years, such as staff shortages and burn-out, what is the most critical step FEMA should take to ensure it can respond adequately to hurricanes and wildfires in 2022? Could you tell us, to your own knowledge, if FEMA has implemented this action?

Answer. We believe that implementing key GAO recommendations related to FEMA's disaster workforce is a critical step FEMA should take in ensuring that it can respond adequately to disasters in 2022 and beyond. We have designated two recommendations related to FEMA's workforce as priority recommendations for DHS, meaning we believe they warrant priority attention and can substantially improve or transform major Government programs or agencies.²¹ Specifically, FEMA should: (1) Develop a plan—with time frames and milestones and input from field leadership—to address identified challenges that have hindered FEMA's ability to provide reliable and complete information to field leaders and managers about staff knowledge, skills, and abilities; and (2) develop mechanisms, including collecting relevant data, to assess how effectively FEMA's disaster workforce was deployed to meet mission needs in the field. Although FEMA has taken some steps to implement these two priority recommendations, it has not yet fully addressed them. We have provided a detailed status update for each recommendation in response to Ranking Member John Katko's third question.²²

QUESTION FROM CHAIRWOMAN VAL DEMINGS FOR CARRA S. SIMS^{23 24}

Question. The 2020 RAND report on harassment and discrimination in the FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] workplace concludes that "One vital component in organization change is measurement of the problem."²⁵ To that end, I know the RAND Corporation conducted a follow-up survey of the FEMA workforce last year. What is the status of this follow-up survey and when do you expect to release your findings?

Answer. We have fielded a second survey at FEMA. We are currently conducting this analysis and completing documentation. While we do not have an expected release date yet because the work is still in progress, we will share the published report with the committee and its members as soon as it is complete, has gone through RAND's rigorous quality assurance review, and has cleared FEMA and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS's) public release review process.

QUESTIONS FROM RANKING MEMBER JOHN KATKO FOR CARRA S. SIMS

Question 1. In your opinion, what steps should FEMA be taking to effectively balance and respond to these priorities?

²⁰FEMA's steps to respond to this recommendation are detailed on GAO's website at <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-360>.

²¹GAO-20-360 and GAO-21-377PR.

²²FEMA's steps to respond to these recommendations are detailed on GAO's website at <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-360>.

²³The opinions and conclusions expressed in this addendum are the author's alone and should not be interpreted as representing those of the RAND Corporation or any of the sponsors of its research.

²⁴The RAND Corporation is a research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure, healthier, and more prosperous. RAND is nonprofit, nonpartisan, and committed to the public interest. RAND's mission is enabled through its core values of quality and objectivity and its commitment to integrity and ethical behavior. RAND subjects its research publications to a robust and exacting quality-assurance process; avoids financial and other conflicts of interest through staff training, project screening, and a policy of mandatory disclosure; and pursues transparency through the open publication of research findings and recommendations, disclosure of the source of funding of published research, and policies to ensure intellectual independence. This testimony is not a research publication, but witnesses affiliated with RAND routinely draw on relevant research conducted in the organization.

²⁵This is referring to Coreen Farris, Carra S. Sims, Terry L. Schell, Miriam Matthews, Sierra Smucker, Samantha Cohen, and Owen Hall, *Harassment and Discrimination on the Basis of Gender and Race/Ethnicity in the FEMA Workforce*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-A383-1, 2020, www.rand.org/t/RR-A383-1.

Answer. Our study did not speak to how FEMA should balance its priorities, though a reduction in harassment and discrimination would potentially facilitate staff retention and productivity. Our study did provide recommendations aimed at helping FEMA leadership make decisions about programming and policy responses to address harassment and discrimination in the workplace. In 2019, we offered several recommendations to FEMA, including the following:

1. Explore differences in culture and climate between offices that had low rates of civil rights violations and those with higher rates.
2. Explore interventions with leaders at all levels to ensure that all understand how best to handle harassment and understand their responsibility to address it.
3. Reduce barriers to reporting.
4. Increase accountability and transparency in dealing with harassment and discrimination reports at all levels of leadership.
5. Continue monitoring harassment and discrimination in the workforce.

Question 2. During a Transportation and Infrastructure hearing last year, Administrator Criswell noted “many of our staff have been activated in support of COVID-19 [coronavirus disease 2019] response operations and numerous other disaster declarations for over a year . . .”. How is employee morale and job performance impacted when response personnel are continually redeployed from one disaster to the next?

Answer. The question relates to how employees manage stress and well-being and maintain performance when they are assigned to one disaster after another with no rest period in between. Our study did not directly investigate the effects of COVID-19 and continual disaster deployment on morale at FEMA, or how employees manage stress and well-being and maintain performance. However, our study did suggest that experiencing harassment and discrimination may reduce productivity and retention, while the broader literature suggests more-general wellness impacts.

Other colleagues at RAND have examined the issue of workforce stress and resilience. For example, experts have reviewed existing programs for the DHS workforce to support psychological health and resilience and have found a limited evidence base for most workplace psychological health interventions, as well as variation in access to services and the potential effectiveness of programs. Their recommendations suggest additional ways for DHS to move forward in ensuring its employees have access to evidence-based programs to support the response to the stressors they inevitably face.²⁶

Question 3. The RAND report states that FEMA asked you to determine the extent to which harassment and discrimination based on sex, gender, race, or ethnicity occurred in its entire workforce. How typical of a request is this—for an agency to request a self-assessment—and how does FEMA compare to other Federal agencies in this regard?

Answer. This is not a typical request. In fact, FEMA is, to our knowledge, the first organization to request such information formally or informally without some external requirement being instituted by Congress or by a class action lawsuit. By utilizing independent expertise and publicly sharing this information, FEMA allows other organizations, both public and private, access to credible estimates and the opportunity to learn from its experience.

The uniqueness of this request is actually why it is so difficult to provide comparators for the prevalence rates FEMA experienced in the year prior to the survey. Biennial Department of Defense (DoD) surveys and the 2016 U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board survey of Federal employees are among the exceptions. In DoD’s case, those surveys are actually mandated by law rather than organizational choice.

Comparing Sexual Harassment at FEMA to Other Organizations

Using a similar measurement approach, designed by the same team of RAND researchers, DoD found that 24.2 percent of active-duty service women and 6.3 percent of active-duty servicemen experienced sexual harassment in the past year. Compared to the annual estimates for FEMA employees (19.3 percent of female FEMA employees and 7.0 percent of male FEMA employees), the prevalence was higher for women in DoD and similar for men in DoD.

The DoD workforce skews very young, which may explain the difference among women; younger adults are at higher risk than older adults.

The U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board used a different survey measure of sexual harassment than was used for the FEMA Workplace Support Survey and as-

²⁶ Carrie M. Farmer, Katie Whipkey, and Margaret Chamberlin, *Programs Addressing Psychological Health and Resilience in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1952-DHS, 2019, www.rand.org/t/RR1952.

essed sexual harassment in the past 2 years rather than only the past year. Across the entire Federal workforce (including DoD), the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board estimated that 20.9 percent of women were sexually harassed in the past 2 years, while we estimated that 19.3 percent of FEMA women were sexually harassed in the past year.

Comparing Racial/Ethnic Harassment at FEMA to Other Organizations

Using a similar measurement approach, DoD found that 16.5 percent of active component service members experienced racial/ethnic harassment and 5.6 percent experienced racial/ethnic discrimination in the prior year. Compared to the annual estimates for FEMA employees (16.0 percent racial/ethnic harassment and 6.5 percent racial/ethnic discrimination), the DoD estimates are similar.

Question 4. The RAND report found that women were more likely to experience a civil rights violation; however, the rates of civil rights violations varied significantly across offices. Specifically, women in FEMA Regional Offices and the Office of the Administrator reported the highest percentage of employees having experienced a gender-based/sexual harassment violation. While I recognize that the report did not explore why some offices have higher prevalence rates than others, based on other findings in the report, do you have any thoughts on what might be causing these variations in rates?

In your opinion, is this something that would be worth exploring in future reports?

Answer. We did not have the purview to explore this issue in depth, as you note. However, we did recommend that FEMA might wish to consider the issue with regard to determining whether some offices had best practices that could be used more broadly across the organization. We suggested that policy and enforcement of norms of behavior might differ in offices with higher and lower rates of civil rights violations. However, we also noted that it would be important to consider demographic and employee characteristic differences of the offices that might be predictive of prevalence, to rule out the hypothesis that simple demographic or employment characteristics account for the variation across offices. This is something that we think would be worth pursuing, but our study, including our follow-up, are not best suited to pursue these questions.

Question 5. Dr. Sims, the RAND report describes findings from a survey fielded in 2019; to what extent is RAND or the Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center [HSOAC] planning on conducting follow-up to see if anything has changed in the past 2 years? Are you aware of actions that FEMA has taken because of your report?

Answer. In response to our findings, FEMA published the Culture Improvement Action Plan, designed to “increase employee awareness of RAND survey results; provide transparent communication of workforce culture objectives, programs, and improvements and associated implementation time lines; [and] demonstrate continued leadership commitment to [FEMA’s] core values.”²⁷ The action plan included 3-, 6-, and 12-month implementation plans for increasing: (1) Engagement and advocacy, (2) training and education, (3) messaging and communications, (4) employee resources, (5) performance and accountability, and (6) monitoring and assessment. Together, these efforts were intended to “ensure FEMA remains a safe workplace free of harassment and discrimination.”²⁸

In addition, to understand whether efforts to reduce prevalence are succeeding, FEMA asked HSOAC researchers to repeat the workforce survey 2 years after the first survey had been administered. We have fielded this second survey and are in the course of analyzing the results in order to complete that study prior to public release.

Question 6a. Your testimony states that the RAND Corporation estimated that 29 percent of FEMA employees experienced a sex- or race/ethnicity-based civil rights violation in the past year, with many of these employees reportedly experiencing both types of violations.

What are some examples of such violations that occur most commonly within the FEMA workforce and how do these violations affect employee morale?

Question 6b. In response to RAND’s report, FEMA issued a Culture Action Improvement Plan. What are your thoughts on this plan? Has this plan provided sufficient initiatives or plans on how the agency should prevent and/or mitigate these types of violations?

²⁷ FEMA, *Culture Improvement Action Plan*, December 2020, p. 1, https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_culture-improvement-action-plan_2020.pdf.

²⁸ FEMA, 2020, p. 14.

Answer. We used behaviorally-based survey measures to estimate the percentage of FEMA employees who had experienced at least one civil rights violation in the preceding year. These measures first documented inappropriate workplace behaviors, and then, where applicable, we followed these initial screening questions with questions to assess additional legal requirements necessary for these experiences to rise to the level of a civil rights violation, such as questions that assess persistence or whether most people would consider the behavior offensive—this last being the “reasonable person” standard. For exemplars as to what types of behaviors civil rights violations included, in Table 1 and Table 2 we provide the top 5 most frequently chosen example behaviors for gender-based/sexual behaviors and race/ethnicity-based behaviors, respectively.²⁹

²⁹In the full report, see Table 3.2 for additional gender-based/sexual inappropriate workplace behaviors, Table 6.1 for additional racial/ethnic harassment inappropriate workplace behaviors, and Table 6.3 for racial/ethnic discrimination inappropriate workplace behaviors. Note that Table 2 in this document does not show racial/ethnic discrimination inappropriate workplace behaviors because none of them were endorsed as frequently as the harassment behaviors.

TABLE 1.—ESTIMATED PERCENTAGE OF FEMA EMPLOYEES WHO HAD EXPERIENCED GENDER-BASED/SEXUAL (SEXIST) INAPPROPRIATE WORKPLACE BEHAVIORS IN THE PRECEDING YEAR, BY GENDER

Type of Behavior	Men	Women	Overall
Hostile work environment sexual harassment behavior: Repeatedly tell sexual jokes that made you uncomfortable, angry, or upset ...	4.4 (3.8–5.2)	7.6 (6.8–8.5)	6.0 (5.5–6.6)
Hostile work environment gender-based (sexist) harassment behavior: Made you uncomfortable, angry, or upset by ignoring or excluding you because [you are a man/you are a woman/of your gender]	5.0 (4.4–5.8)	14.5 (13.4–15.6)	9.8 (9.1–10.5)
Made you uncomfortable, angry, or upset by making sexist comments about your gender	3.3 (2.8–3.9)	10.5 (9.6–11.5)	6.9 (6.3–7.5)
Gender discrimination: Make it harder for you to get a promotion or a new position because [you are a man/you are a woman/of your gender]	6.4 (5.6–7.4)	9.7 (8.8–10.7)	8.1 (7.4–8.8)
Assign you to either an undesirable or unimportant task because [you are a man/you are a woman/of your gender]	4.6 (3.8–5.6)	9.6 (8.7–10.7)	7.1 (6.5–7.8)

NOTE: The 95-percent confidence interval for each estimate is indicated in parentheses.

TABLE 2.—ESTIMATED PERCENTAGE OF FEMA EMPLOYEES WHO HAD EXPERIENCED EACH RACIAL/ETHNIC HARASSMENT BEHAVIOR IN THE PRECEDING YEAR, BY RACE/ETHNICITY

	White	African American	Hispanic	Other	Unknown Race/ Ethnicity	Overall
Made you uncomfortable, angry, or upset by showing you a lack of respect because of your race/ethnicity	6.2 (5.4–7.0)	15.1 (13.3–17.1)	11.6 (10.0–13.3)	10.2 (7.2–14.3)	7.8 (5.4–11.2)	9.3 (8.6–10.0)
Made you uncomfortable, angry, or upset by telling racial/ethnic jokes	7.1 (6.3–8.0)	9.8 (8.3–11.5)	10.0 (8.5–11.8)	12.0 (8.7–16.3)	7.6 (5.1–11.1)	8.4 (7.7–9.1)
Made you uncomfortable, angry, or upset by insulting your racial/ethnic group	5.0 (4.3–5.8)	8.5 (7.1–10.3)	9.1 (7.7–10.7)	13.1 (9.5–17.8)	6.6 (4.4–9.8)	6.8 (6.2–7.5)
Used a racial/ethnic term that made you uncomfortable, angry, or upset	6.0 (5.2–6.8)	6.7 (5.5–8.1)	5.8 (4.7–7.1)	8.6 (5.7–12.8)	5.0 (3.0–8.3)	6.2 (5.6–6.8)
Made you uncomfortable, angry, or upset by making a comment about the way people in your racial/ethnic group talk	3.4 (2.8–4.1)	7.5 (6.3–8.9)	11.2 (9.6–13.0)	9.6 (6.5–13.9)	4.4 (2.7–7.3)	5.8 (5.2–6.3)

NOTE: The 95-percent confidence interval for each estimate is indicated in parentheses.

We did not assess morale in our study. However, for an employee categorized as having experienced harassment or discrimination in the preceding year, the survey included an item that asked whether they had taken “a sick day or any other type of leave” as a consequence of the situation. The survey also included an item asking whether the upsetting situation made them want to quit. Although neither item assesses morale directly, they provide a very basic indication of potential productivity and retention issues. Many victims indicated having used at least 1 leave day as a result of the situation, varying from 16.4 percent of racial/ethnic harassment victims to 39.9 percent of racial/ethnic discrimination victims. In addition, about one-third of employees who had experienced harassment (28.6 to 31.3 percent) indicated that the situation made them “want to quit.” Employees who had experienced discrimination were twice as likely to want to leave their positions; nearly two-thirds indicated that the situation made them “want to quit” (57.8 to 65.3 percent).³⁰

As you note, FEMA published the Culture Improvement Action Plan, designed to “increase employee awareness of RAND survey results; provide transparent communication of workforce culture objectives, programs, and improvements and associated implementation time lines; [and] demonstrate continued leadership commitment to [FEMA’s] core values.”³¹ The action plan included 3-, 6-, and 12-month implementation plans for increasing: (1) Engagement and advocacy, (2) training and education, (3) messaging and communications, (4) employee resources, (5) performance and accountability, and (6) monitoring and assessment.

We did not assess this plan systematically and so cannot speak to specifics of its implementation. That said, as we noted in our report, a comprehensive and holistic set of interventions that incentivize professional and respectful workplace behavior can help leaders ensure that the FEMA work environment is one in which individual tendencies toward negative behavior are suppressed. Certainly, as described, the intent of the plan appears to be to develop such a comprehensive and holistic set of interventions with an emphasis on transparency.

I would note that the evidence base for exactly what recommendations to implement when you have a high rate of civil rights violations in an organization tends to be sparse. This means that specific and detailed recommendations are hard to come by in the literature, so interventions that appear reasonable and are paired with reasonable plans to assess how well they are working are key. To the extent that FEMA’s plans both seem reasonable and include a measurement component to make sure they are working rather than just providing liability protection, they are on the right track. If implementation of some aspects is less successful, trying something different should not be perceived as failure but rather FEMA being in the forefront of transparent efforts to alleviate its challenges.

Question 7. The RAND report states that, “for each type of discrimination, 35 percent or more indicated that they were subject to retaliation.” However, the report is unclear as to whether an evaluation of how supervisors handle these issues is a part of the performance review cycle. Since the publication of this report, do you know if FEMA has updated their performance evaluations to include this criteria?

Answer. We do not have this information. A representative from FEMA would likely be able to speak to that issue.

QUESTION FROM HONORABLE DIANA HARSHBARGER FOR CARRA S. SIMS

Question. In your view, would awarding FEMA contracts to contractors physically located near disaster sites produce favorable outcomes both by expediting the process of getting boots on the ground and by providing work to residents affected by the disaster? Should FEMA consider updating their contracting processes to prioritize contractors located near the disaster site?

Answer. Our study did not speak to these issues, so this is not a question we would be able to answer.

QUESTION FROM HONORABLE PETER MEIJER FOR CARRA S. SIMS

Question. Given the challenges the FEMA workforce has faced over the past few years, such as staff shortages and burn-out, what is the most critical step FEMA should take to ensure it can respond adequately to hurricanes and wildfires in 2022? Could you tell us, to your own knowledge, if FEMA has implemented this action?

Answer. Our study deals with harassment and discrimination rather than staffing or burn-out, although harassment and discrimination definitely have an impact on employee well-being and can affect retention. Given the scope of our study, and sug-

³⁰ See Farris et al., 2020, pp. 77–78, for more in-depth description.

³¹ FEMA, 2020, p. 1.

gestions of challenges FEMA faces in the domains of employee climate for harassment, perceptions surrounding employees' reporting of civil rights violations, and subsequent retaliation, we recommended that FEMA ensure that leaders at all levels know what to do with a report and have the tools at hand to take action (including a familiarity and comfort with lower levels of sanctions, such as talking with the offender about appropriate behavior). We also suggested that FEMA track interventions to achieve these aims in order to determine whether they worked and increase transparency surrounding these issues.

FEMA has put a plan in place—the Culture Improvement Action Plan—to help implement changes,³² but the scope of our follow-on survey does not include assessing that plan or its implementation. However, the public release of the plan itself does speak to an increase in transparency. For further details on the success of the implementation, I would recommend that you speak to FEMA.



³² See FEMA, 2020.