

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

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS,
RESPONSE, AND RECOVERY
OF THE
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FEMA: BUILDING A WORKFORCE PREPARED AND READY TO RESPOND PART II

Tuesday, March 1, 2022

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

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10 a.m., via Webex, Hon. Val Butler Demings [Chairwoman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Demings, Jackson Lee, Payne, Green, Cammack, Higgins, Watson Coleman, Miller-Meeks, and Garbarino.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. The Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery will be in order. Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare the subcommittee in recess at any point.

Good morning, everyone. Our hearing today is a continuation of a very important topic that the subcommittee examined on January 20, the Federal Emergency Management Agency's work force. I am pleased that FEMA Deputy Director Erik Hooks is joining our hearing this morning.

As we all know, the most valuable resources of any organization are the men and women on the ground executing the mission. FEMA's work force works nonstop to help those in need, and I am so grateful for their dedication to their mission.

As a former law enforcement officer and as a Member of Congress now, I have personally seen the incredible work FEMA has done to support Floridians in the wake of disasters, like Hurricane Charley, Frances, Ivan, Jeanne in 2004, and Hurricane Irma in 2017.

In recent years, FEMA has faced unprecedented challenges and growing responsibilities that have taken a toll on the agency's work force. FEMA has risen to the challenge of meeting an expanded mission scope, helping with everything from the resettlement of Afghan evacuees to responding to record-breaking natural disasters.

As the threat of climate change continues to grow, sadly, severe weather is becoming the new normal, a reality that will only further add stressors to FEMA's already burdened workload. The demands of climate change puts on the FEMA work force—or the demands that climate change puts on the FEMA work force are unprecedented. The increase in disaster declaration in recent years reflects a significant increase in FEMA's workload. Compared to

the 1960's, when there was, on average, 18 disasters every year, we saw 104 major disaster declarations in 2020, and 58 major disaster declarations in 2021.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 response continues to be a part of FEMA's workload. A U.S. Government Accountability Office report found that over half of FEMA's Public Assistance work force had spent time working on the COVID-19 response for their primary duty station, meaning that fewer FEMA employees can focus on long-term recovery for existing projects.

Regularly, new challenges and threats arise, stressing the importance of FEMA's mission. For example, FEMA's work force also plays a central role in ensuring our communities are protected from man-made threats through the administration of several grant programs, including the Nonprofit Security Grant Program. The recent spate of bomb threats against Historically Black Colleges and Universities, along with houses of worship, emphasize the importance of the Nonprofit Security Grant Program in guarding our communities against the terrorist attacks and the extent that we depend on the FEMA work force to provide these critical resources.

Increased responsibilities and crises have led to challenges with recruitment, training, and retention. These work force challenges have the potential to jeopardize FEMA's ability to meet the mission. In recent years, FEMA has taken important steps to grow its work force. Between fiscal year 2016 and 2021, the FEMA work force grew by almost 8,000 employees, a significant achievement. However, FEMA still has work to do in reaching its target staffing levels.

FEMA relies on reservist employees that are called upon to temporarily respond to disasters as they arise. However, given training restraints and the lack of employment protections and benefits for these employees, FEMA has struggled to maintain the strongest reservist work force.

FEMA has also taken steps to build a more inclusive and diverse work force that better reflects the communities it serves. Similarly, FEMA committed to additional accountability initiatives to combat workplace harassment and discrimination.

I applaud Administrator Criswell's prioritization of the FEMA work force within the 2022 to 2026 Strategic Plan. Furthermore, under the Biden administration FEMA has emphasized a new focus on equity, central to which is ensuring a diverse and inclusive work force that represents the diversity of American communities that it seeks to serve.

With that, I am very pleased to welcome FEMA's Deputy Administrator Erik Hooks before the committee today. I look forward to hearing about FEMA's work to support its workplace and hear how Congress can best support the agency in its mission.

[The statement of Chairwoman Demings follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRWOMAN VAL DEMINGS

MARCH 1, 2022

Our hearing today is a continuation of a very important topic that the subcommittee examined on January 20, the Federal Emergency Management Agency's workforce. I am pleased that FEMA Deputy Administrator Erik Hooks is joining our hearing this morning. As we all know, the most valuable resources of any organiza-

tion are the men and women on the ground, executing the mission. FEMA's workforce works nonstop to help those in need, and I am so grateful for their dedication to the mission.

As a former law enforcement officer and a Member of Congress, I have personally seen the incredible work FEMA has done to support Floridians in the wake of disasters, like Hurricanes Charley, Frances, Ivan, and Jeanne in 2004 and Hurricane Irma in 2017.

In recent years, FEMA has faced unprecedented challenges and growing responsibilities that have taken a toll on the agency's workforce. FEMA has risen to the challenge of meeting an expanded mission scope—helping with everything from the resettlement of Afghan evacuees to responding to record-breaking natural disasters.

As the threat of climate change continues to grow, sadly, severe weather is becoming the new normal—a reality that will only further add stressors to FEMA's already-burdened workload.

The demands climate change puts on the FEMA workforce are unprecedented. The increase in disaster declarations in recent years reflects a significant increase in FEMA's workload. Compared to the 1960's when there were on average 18 disasters every year, we saw 104 major disaster declarations in 2020, and in 2021 there were 58 major disaster declarations.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 response continues to be a part of FEMA's workload. A U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report found that over half of FEMA's Public Assistance workforce has spent time working on the COVID-19 response from their primary duty station, meaning that fewer FEMA employees can focus on long-term recovery for existing projects.

Regularly, new challenges and threats arise, stressing the importance of FEMA's mission. For example, FEMA's workforce also plays a central role in ensuring our communities are protected from man-made threats through the administration of several grant programs, including the Nonprofit Security Grant Program.

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FEMA relies on reservist employees that are called upon to temporarily respond to disasters as they arise. However, given training constraints and the lack of employment protections and benefits for these employees, FEMA has struggled to maintain a strong reservist workforce.

FEMA has also taken steps to build a more inclusive and diverse workforce that better reflect the communities it serves. Similarly, FEMA committed to additional accountability initiatives to combat workplace harassment and discrimination.

I applaud Administrator Deanne Criswell's prioritization of the FEMA workforce within the 2022-2026 FEMA Strategic Plan. Furthermore, under the Biden administration FEMA has emphasized a new focus on equity, central to which is ensuring a diverse and inclusive workforce that represents the diversity of American communities that it seeks to serve.

On that note, I am very pleased to welcome FEMA Deputy Administrator Erik Hooks before the committee today, and I look forward to hearing about FEMA's work to support its workplace and hear how Congress can best support the agency in its mission.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. The Chair now recognizes the Ranking Member of the Emergency Preparedness, Response, & Recovery Subcommittee, the gentlewoman from Florida, Mrs. Cammack, for an opening statement.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Well, thank you, Chairwoman Demings. Thank you to my colleagues for joining us for this important hearing today.

Now, before I begin, I do want to take a moment to recognize all of the hardworking men and women at FEMA. We truly cannot

thank you enough for your extraordinary work and dedication in some of our Nation's toughest times of need, so thank you.

Now, about a month, ago, this committee—this subcommittee held a hearing to discuss the challenges facing the FEMA work force. During that hearing, we heard testimony from representatives from GAO and RAND and from former FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate, who, I am proud to say, is a constituent of mine and calls the Gator Nation home.

During the course of the hearing, much of our discussion centered around how FEMA's mission sets have grown in recent years. FEMA has led the Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, assisted in the Afghan refugee resettlement efforts, and provided operational support to the Department of Health and Human Services with unaccompanied children crossing the border. FEMA has been called upon to handle these new challenges, all while facing an unprecedented number of natural disasters.

That hearing, unfortunately, did little to alleviate my concern that while FEMA employees are incredibly capable and resilient, these multiple mission sets and the abundance of natural disasters are exhausting the work force, creating burnout. I do recognize that employee burnout is an issue that FEMA Administrator Criswell has been working to address, so it is my hope that during this hearing today we will learn about the proactive steps the agency is taking to remedy this problem.

In addition to discussing these multiple mission sets, we also heard from RAND about a survey they conducted on harassment and discrimination in the FEMA workplace. The survey found that of the personnel that completed the survey, about 29 percent of employees experienced sex, race, or ethnicity-based discrimination. The survey also found that women were more likely to experience a civil rights violation, and that rates of civil rights of violations varied significantly across the different FEMA offices.

As a result of this survey, FEMA published a Culture Improvement Action Plan, which was designed to increase employee awareness of the RAND survey results and provide transparent communication of work force culture objectives. FEMA also made anti-sexual harassment training mandatory across the agency.

Now, I applaud the steps that FEMA has taken to address these serious issues and I look forward to hearing more from Deputy Administrator Hooks today about how the culture at the agency has improved.

It is also my understanding that RAND has conducted a second survey. I look forward to reviewing those results when they are published.

We also heard testimony from GAO, who have conducted a number of reports over the years examining the FEMA work force. The GAO reports focused on a number of specific concerns, including staffing shortages and FEMA's challenges in deploying staff with the right qualifications and skills at the right times to meet disaster needs.

Both GAO and former FEMA Administrator Fugate's testimony highlighted the difficulties that FEMA has had in growing and developing their reservist work force. Ensuring a well-trained reservist work force is essential given that they often comprise some of

the greatest proportion of FEMA staff in the field during a disaster.

Now, before I yield back, Mr. Currie from GAO brought up one point during that hearing that has really stuck with me. He highlighted that FEMA is currently managing almost 1,000 prior disasters that are in some stage of recovery today. That means that FEMA is still dealing with disasters from 5, 10, and even 15 years ago.

As we look at ways to strengthen and improve the FEMA work force, I believe it is critical that we also look at ways to update some of FEMA's policies and procedures to help address existing backlogs. Addressing this backlog and the reasons behind it will help communities recover faster and also will help alleviate some of the pressure on the FEMA work force. Because as the past few years have shown, there is no longer a down season for disasters.

I look forward to hearing from Deputy Administrator Hooks today regarding these challenges facing FEMA and about the steps that the agency is taking to move forward in a positive manner.

With that, I yield back to the Chairwoman, Mrs. Demings from the great State of Florida. I yield back.

[The statement of Ranking Member Cammack follows:]

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER KAT CAMMACK

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

Before I begin, I do want to take a moment to recognize all the hardworking men and women at FEMA. We truly cannot thank you enough for the extraordinary work that you do, each and every day.

A little over a month ago, this subcommittee held a hearing to discuss the challenges facing the FEMA workforce. During that hearing we heard testimony from representatives from GAO and RAND, and from former FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate.

During the course of the hearing, much of our discussion centered around how FEMA's mission sets have grown in recent years. FEMA has led the Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, assisted in the Afghan refugee resettlement efforts, and provided operational support to the Department of Health and Human Services with unaccompanied children crossing the border.

FEMA has been called upon to handle these new challenges, all while facing an unprecedented number of natural disasters.

That hearing, unfortunately, did little to alleviate my concern that, while FEMA employees are incredibly capable and resilient, these multiple mission sets, and the abundance of natural disasters are exhausting the workforce.

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FEMA also made anti-sexual harassment training mandatory across the agency. I applaud the steps that FEMA has already taken to address this serious issue and I look forward to hearing more from Deputy Administrator Hooks today about how the culture at the agency has improved.

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Because as the past few years have shown, there is no longer a down season for disasters.

I look forward to hearing from Deputy Administrator Hooks today regarding the challenges facing FEMA, and about the steps that the agency is taking to move forward positively.

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

Chairwoman DEMINGS. The Chair thanks the Ranking Member, Mrs. Cammack. Members are reminded that the committee 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 subcommittee shall be permitted to sit and question the witnesses. Additional Member statements may be submitted for the record.

[The statement of Chairman Thompson follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BENNIE G. THOMPSON

MARCH 1, 2022

In January, the subcommittee held a hearing on this important topic with former FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate, the Government Accountability Office (GAO), and the RAND Corporation. I am pleased the subcommittee is continuing the conversation with FEMA's newly-confirmed deputy administrator, Erik Hooks. At the outset, let me thank the FEMA workforce for their service. They play a pivotal role in protecting our communities, including in my home State of Mississippi, where we have been hit by several disasters over the years.

FEMA's workforce has been challenged with responding to multiple large-scale disasters while being pulled into other critical missions. They have carried out response efforts related to the COVID-19 pandemic and supported other Federal agencies' missions, such as Operation Allies Welcome. FEMA is also responsible for allocating homeland security grants, including those designed to help nonprofit organizations protect themselves from terrorist threats.

FEMA's ability to support the Federal Government's efforts in a variety of missions demonstrates its workforce's skill and adaptability. Nonetheless, the growing number of missions and the overall workload have strained the agency. Currently, FEMA is dealing with workforce challenges, including hiring, training, and retention. I am particularly concerned about hiring challenges within FEMA. Over the years, the agency has struggled to hire staff.

After the devastating 2017 hurricanes, GAO found that FEMA faced challenges in training employees and maintaining staffing levels across concurrent disasters. Another workforce challenge is retention. In 2020, more FEMA workers transferred to other agencies than in any other year over the past decade. This attrition could be the result of burnt-out, as FEMA employees have been going from one mission to the next, often without any reprieve between missions. Equally troubling is the agency is addressing harassment, gender, race, and ethnicity findings that were identified in a 2020 RAND Corporation report.

The Biden administration is focusing on strengthening the FEMA workforce through its fiscal year 2022 budget request and in Administrator Deanne Criswell's

2022–2026 FEMA Strategic Plan. While these are important first steps, more work needs to be done to ensure that FEMA has a robust workforce that is fully equipped to handle its growing mission. I look forward to hearing from the deputy administrator today about the challenges facing the men and women of FEMA and what Congress can do to make this dedicated workforce stronger.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. I now welcome our witness, Mr. Erik Hooks, deputy administrator of FEMA, Federal Emergency Management Agency. In July 2021, Mr. Hooks was appointed by President Biden for the role of deputy administrator. He was confirmed by the U.S. Senate in December 2021.

Prior to his time at FEMA, Mr. Hooks spent over 30 years in public service in his home State of North Carolina, where he focused on public safety, law enforcement, and emergency management. In 2017, Mr. Hooks was appointed by Governor Cooper to be North Carolina’s secretary of public safety and homeland security advisor, where he led the State’s disaster mitigation response and recovery efforts.

Mr. Deputy Administrator, I understand that this is your first time testifying since your confirmation. Welcome and we look forward to your testimony.

Without objection, the witness’ full statement will be inserted in the record. I now ask Deputy Administrator Hooks to summarize his statement for 5 minutes.

OK, we apparently have some technical difficulties. We are going to recess just for a couple of minutes. I ask the Members to please stand by. We will notify when we are back up. Thank you.

[Recess]

Chairwoman DEMINGS. OK. I do believe that we are back. Deputy Administrator, can you hear me?

Mr. HOOKS. Yes, ma’am, Madam Chair. My deepest apologies for the technical errors.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. That is OK. Maybe during the question what can Congress do to assist, but anyway, we are so glad that you are back with us. We are glad that our Members are here as well.

I am going to yield to you to summarize your statement for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF ERIK A. HOOKS, DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR,
FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (FEMA), U.S.
DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY**

Mr. HOOKS. Thank you, Chair Demings, Ranking Member Cammack, and Members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss FEMA’s on-going efforts to bolster our Nation’s emergency management work force and describe how the agency’s new Strategic Plan guides this priority.

FEMA’s mission of helping people before, during, and after disasters has never been more critical. The field of emergency management is at a pivotal moment due to the tremendous change in our Nation’s risk landscape. In the last 2 years alone, FEMA has faced historic natural disasters, a Nation-wide COVID–19 pandemic, and other challenging missions. Our work force of nearly 22,000 emergency managers does exceptional work every day, and ensuring their continued readiness and well-being is a priority for Administrator Criswell and for me. I will briefly describe FEMA’s on-going

efforts to bolster our work force and the broader emergency management community within the context of 3 strategic goals in our Strategic Plan.

Our first strategic goal is to instill equity as a foundation of emergency management. We know disasters, both natural and otherwise, impact people and—

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Deputy Administrator, I am so sorry to interrupt you. I need to officially do a countdown to officially declare us out of recess, so if you would just bear with me.

Five, four, three, two, one. The Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness and Response is now out of recess and is reconvening.

Deputy Administrator, back to you. Thank you.

Mr. HOOKS. Thank you. We know disasters, both natural and otherwise, impact people and communities differently, based on geography, demographics, and historical and cultural characteristics. These unique contexts require tailored solutions designed to meet their unique needs. Underserved communities often suffer disproportionately from disasters. By instilling equity as a foundation of emergency management, we can break—we can work to break this cycle and build a more resilient Nation.

FEMA is committed to ensuring our employees increasingly reflect the diversity of the Nation. In alignment with our Strategic Plan, FEMA is working to recruit individuals from underrepresented communities. This includes partnering with organizations such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities to help create hiring pipelines into the field of emergency management. The agency will also continue to invest in professional development for all FEMA employees to foster an environment where individuals feel safe, valued, and empowered.

Our second strategic goal is to lead the whole of community in climate resilience. Administrative Criswell has called climate change the crisis of our generation. In 2020 alone, there were a record 22 weather- and climate-related disaster events across the United States whose losses exceeded \$1 billion; 2021 was a close second. The growing severity of these events increases the time it takes for communities to recover, and this process can be further complicated by repeated disasters in areas already struggling to bounce back from past events. In this regard, I would like to thank Congress for providing FEMA with additional resources to mitigate the impact of climate change by passing the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which includes funding for grants to establish revolving loan funds and additional resources for FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Assistance Grant Program.

Our third strategic goal is to promote and sustain a ready FEMA and a prepared Nation. The increase in frequency, severity, and complexity of disasters has heightened demands on FEMA's work force and on those across the larger emergency management community.

To adapt to that trend, FEMA must expand its approach to agency readiness and National preparedness. This expansion necessitates an increase in the Nation's overall emergency management capabilities at all levels of Government and society. Through FEMA's training programs, including the Center for Domestic Pre-

paredness, the agency is working to make training available to emergency managers where they are at any time in their careers.

Internally, FEMA is also taking steps to improve our ability to meet the increasing number of current and emerging threats requiring Federal support. As we implement the new Strategic Plan and prepare for what lies ahead, our work force has never been more experienced or tested. Since joining the agency in December 2021, I have been impressed by their adaptability, dedication, and hard work. However, Administrator Criswell and I recognize that much has been asked of them and we are committed to supporting the FEMA work force in every way possible.

As the former secretary of public safety in North Carolina, I understand, like many of you, how disasters impact communities. FEMA personnel meet people on what is likely the worst days of their lives. Our work force demonstrates the very best in America.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hooks follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ERIK A. HOOKS

MARCH 1, 2021

Chair Demings, Ranking Member Cammack, and Members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss FEMA's on-going efforts to bolster our Nation's emergency management workforce and describe how the agency's new Strategic Plan guides this priority.

FEMA's mission of helping people before, during, and after disasters has never been more critical. The field of emergency management is at a pivotal moment due to the tremendous change in our Nation's risk landscape. Disasters are becoming more frequent, severe, and complex, and the demands placed upon the emergency management community are increasing exponentially. In the last 2 years alone, FEMA has faced historic natural disasters, a Nation-wide COVID-19 pandemic, and other challenging missions. Our workforce of nearly 22,000 emergency managers does exceptional work every day, and ensuring their continued readiness and well-being is a priority for Administrator Criswell and for me.

Under the leadership of Administrator Criswell, FEMA released our new Strategic Plan in December 2021. The guiding principles and priorities align with President Biden's vision to improve equitable outcomes for those we serve; increase our Nation's resilience to climate change; and promote a ready and diverse workforce. The Strategic Plan serves as the roadmap for the agency over the next 5 years. Its 3 cross-cutting goals are to: (1) Instill equity as a foundation of emergency management; (2) lead whole of community in climate resilience, and (3) promote and sustain a ready FEMA and prepared Nation. In today's testimony, I will describe FEMA's on-going efforts to bolster both our workforce and the broader emergency management community within the context of these 3 strategic goals.

Our first strategic goal is to instill equity as a foundation of emergency management. We know disasters, both natural and otherwise, impact people and communities differently, based on geography, demographics, and historical and cultural characteristics. These unique contexts require tailored solutions designed to meet their unique needs. Underserved communities often suffer disproportionately from disasters and resulting impacts can worsen inequities already present in society. This cycle compounds the challenges faced by these communities, making it difficult to recover from both current and future disasters. By instilling equity as a foundation of emergency management and striving to meet the unique needs of underserved communities, we can work to break this cycle and build a more resilient Nation.

FEMA is committed to ensuring our employees increasingly reflect the diversity of the Nation. The agency will continue to build an inclusive workforce which represents the many identities, races, ethnicities, backgrounds, abilities, ages, cultures, and beliefs of the people we serve. In alignment with our Strategic Plan, FEMA is working to recruit individuals from underrepresented communities including through partnering with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and the American Indian Higher Education Consortium of Tribal Colleges and Universities to create hiring pipelines into the field of emergency management. The agency

will also continue to invest in professional development for all FEMA employees to foster an environment in which individuals feel safe, valued, and empowered.

Our second strategic goal is to lead whole of community in climate resilience. Administrator Criswell has called climate change “the crisis of our generation.” Due to climate change, natural disasters are more frequent, more intense, and more destructive. In 2020 alone, there were a record 22 weather- and climate-related disaster events across the United States whose losses exceeded \$1 billion. Twenty-two-one was a close second, with 20 weather- and climate-related disasters exceeding \$1 billion in losses. The growing severity of these events increases the time it takes for communities to recover, and this process can be further complicated by repeated disasters in areas already struggling to bounce back from past events. These cascading and compounding impacts pose the greatest risk to our communal and Nation-wide resilience. I would like to thank Congress for working with the Biden-Harris administration to provide FEMA with additional resources to mitigate the impact of climate change by passing the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. The significant funding made available by this legislation for grants to establish revolving loan funds and FEMA’s Hazard Mitigation Assistance Grants will provide our State, local, territorial, and Tribal nation partners with greater financial support for projects which invest in a more resilient Nation, reduce disaster suffering, and lessen future disaster costs. These investments will only grow in importance as climate change continues to alter the landscape of risk facing emergency managers across the country. Additionally, FEMA is working to make sure the agency’s workforce is well-equipped to advise our partners on the best ways to build climate resilient communities.

These challenges require that FEMA build a foundational understanding of climate science, the impacts of climate change, and effective climate adaptation strategies. FEMA will grow a climate-literate workforce through integration of climate science into policy, programs, partnerships, field operations, and training. In 2022, Administrator Criswell is directing a new collaborative steering group comprised of leadership from FEMA’s program offices to begin a multi-year initiative that incorporates climate literacy into relevant training, planning, grant eligibility, and exercises. FEMA program offices and the U.S. Fire Administration will further collaborate to strengthen the capability of State, local, territorial, and Tribal nation partners to advance these critical issues within their pre- and post-disaster work.

Our third strategic goal is to promote and sustain a ready FEMA and prepared Nation. The 2017 hurricane and wildfire seasons marked a change in disaster operations tempo. Compared to 2016, for the past 4 years, FEMA has had more than twice as many staff deployed every day of the year. By November 2020, FEMA was managing 6 times as many disasters, and responses to fire incidents were up 120 percent across the Nation. This increase in frequency, severity, and complexity has heightened demands on FEMA’s workforce and on those across the larger emergency management community.

To adapt to the trend, FEMA must expand its approach to agency readiness and to National preparedness. This expansion necessitates an increase in the Nation’s overall emergency management capabilities at all levels of government, as well as the private and nonprofit sectors, and among individuals, households, and families.

Emergency management is a shared responsibility. We need to continue to bolster the field of emergency management across the country by better defining what it means to be an emergency manager and building standardized career paths for the Nation’s emergency management workforce. FEMA’s educational institutions will lead the effort to advance the emergency management profession by supporting curricula for comprehensive emergency management training, education, and professional development for our partners across the Nation.

Through FEMA’s training programs including the Center for Domestic Preparedness (CDP), the agency is working to make training available to emergency managers anywhere they are, at any time in their careers. FEMA is modernizing their operational design so the Nation’s Federal, State, local, territorial, Tribal nation, non-governmental organization, and private-sector emergency managers can meet the risks posed by increasing hazards, and obtain the training required to become certified within the National Qualification System.

Internally, FEMA is also taking steps to improve our ability to meet the increasing number of current and emergent threats requiring Federal support. As FEMA is increasingly engaged in complex missions beyond typical Stafford Act emergencies and disasters, the agency must envision, plan, and prepare for incidents that do not fall into common disaster categories. FEMA must be able to quickly assess, adapt, and surge. This effort includes bolstering capacity in the agency’s incident management and incident support workforce, continuity communications, and logistics.

As FEMA's incident management and incident support workforce continues to grow, we will also prioritize the growth of the professional workforce which enables them. Our readiness must include having the necessary specialists who can support the agency's disaster workforce, such as the procurement specialists needed to execute the contracts and mission assignments which allows the Government to mobilize assistance; the professionals who facilitate data and information sharing within FEMA's IT infrastructure; those who ensure civil rights are protected in all activities; and the specialists necessary to train the workforce, manage operations, and focus on employee wellness.

As we implement the 2022–2026 Strategic Plan and prepare for what lies ahead, our workforce has never been more experienced or tested. Since joining the agency in December 2021, I have been impressed by their adaptability, dedication, and hard work. However, Administrator Criswell and I recognize that much has been asked of them, and we are committed to supporting the FEMA workforce in every way possible going forward. I ask for that same support from each of you.

As I look back on my time leading the Office of Public Safety in North Carolina, I understand—like many of you—what readiness looks like from the State and local perspective. No less is asked of our Federal responders. The commitment demanded by our profession is not small. FEMA personnel meet people on what is likely one of the worst days of their lives. They support, they help, and along the way they demonstrate the very best of America.

I look forward to all we will accomplish together as we continue to build a more ready and resilient Nation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. I thank the witness for his testimony. I will remind the subcommittee that we will each have 5 minutes to question our witness. I will now recognize myself for questions.

Deputy administrator, for consecutive years now, FEMA has pivoted from one emergency to another, in part driven by the impact of climate change. You have shared the administrator's feelings about the threat of climate change. What are the top work force challenges FEMA is currently facing? How is the agency addressing those challenges? The bottom line, deputy administrator, does FEMA have a sufficient work force to fulfill its obligations?

Mr. HOOKS. Thank you, Madam Chair. You certainly recognize the challenges that face not only FEMA, but really face the Nation. Those challenges of the dynamic and severity of storms has certainly increased, and meeting those challenges head-on is what FEMA is charged to do.

Since my time in coming to the agency in December, I have witnessed a dedicated and committed work force that has worked tirelessly to meet those challenges, but recognized that those challenges are many. So with that, we are constantly evaluating our readiness, our cycles in which we allow our employees and valued staff they have to rest. We are also working diligently to increase our work force.

As you noted in your opening comments, we have made many strides to improve our work force numbers to improve our staffing levels. So we are working through a number of communities, direct hires in local communities, partnering with HBCUs to create that pipeline to establish a new broader base of employees, a ready, willing, and able work force to move us toward the future.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. So, deputy administrator, I mean, you are absolutely correct that the intensity of the major disasters that we are facing, man-made threats as we mentioned as well, COVID-19, but my question, do you believe that FEMA has a sufficient work force? You have talked about the dedication of the men and women, and certainly, I know every Member on both sides of the aisle in this committee share that sentiment about the dedication.

But do you feel that FEMA has a sufficient work force to meet the ever-increasing challenges?

Mr. HOOKS. Ma'am, the most specific answer I could give to that, that that is a process that is on-going. As threats emerge, we have to constantly evaluate the staffing model that we have in place and our readiness to take on those challenges. We have certainly risen to the challenge, but it has worn out our work force. So, we are trying to make those smart investments into our readiness plan, in to our readiness cycle, and also the development of new employees, too, so that when a new disaster hits that they are not just on the roll, but they are ready to meet disaster survivors where there are.

So we are getting better each and every day because we are making those investments in their training, as I referred to earlier. So the nature of disasters move, you know, very dynamically and sometimes we meet those disasters in a way that is fully to our satisfaction, but we always want to do more.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. We have also talked about the challenges of a reservist work force, the lack of perhaps sufficient benefits, support for those employees, the challenges of recruitment, training, retention. Could you talk a little bit about that and what steps you are taking to kind-of mitigate those challenges with keeping a resilient reservist work force?

Mr. HOOKS. Yes, ma'am, that is certainly a challenge, just like the military relies on reserves, FEMA has relied on a ready reserve force to protect our Nation and to respond to disasters. But unlike the military, unfortunately, our work force or our reserves do not have USERA-like protections that would allow them to go back to their jobs and have their jobs maintained for them while they are supporting the Nation. I am aware that—

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Let me ask you, deputy administrator, let me ask you do you believe that you have the authority, that FEMA has the authority to address that issue that you just spoke of?

Mr. HOOKS. Not within ourselves. We are working diligently with the Congress and it is my understanding that the Senate has already made some positive steps with the passage of the CREW Act. So it is in the Congress' hands to move forward to ensure that our reserve work force is strong, willing, and able to move forward.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Thank you so much. I now recognize the Ranking Member of the subcommittee, the gentlewoman from Florida, Mrs. Cammack, for questions.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Thank you, Chairwoman Demings. I am actually going to follow up on the questions and the line of questioning that you were going down, talking about work force challenges, talking about the reservist issues that FEMA faces. You know, I share the same concerns that you do, that you have as well.

So, as a follow-up to that, I would like to ask in the communities that make up our Nation, and you mentioned so many of the reservists have other jobs and it is really a challenge in trying to figure out how we can make up this necessary work force with reservists at the time. But in communities across the country, including mine, community colleges and vocational education programs are critically important to helping ensure that our local industries and businesses are able to meet the work force needs.

So, can you speak to how FEMA is utilizing our community colleges around the country to really bolster the efforts of FEMA in addressing so many of the different disasters that our country is facing?

Mr. HOOKS. Yes. Thank you so much, Ranking Member Cammack. I agree with you that community colleges play a critical role in preparing the work force. I come from the State of North Carolina where we have a robust community college system as well. FEMA is endeavoring to work across the country with community colleges because those are areas where key skills and developments can be made.

So that outreach is on-going. It is a process. Many community colleges already presubscribe for what curriculum that we teach. But in order to professionalize the emergency management further, we have to be in our community colleges as well as our universities to offer the training and the education to provide that ready work force to meet the needs of the Nation.

Mrs. CAMMACK. So, as a follow-up to that, specifically what programs are you promoting and how are you promoting the programs through the community colleges? Are there certificate initiatives that FEMA puts a premium on? Just looking for some more in-the-weeds and in-depth about what these programs are.

Mr. HOOKS. All right. Ranking Member Cammack, if you would give me an opportunity to get back with staff and so I can get you some more granular and specific information, we will be sure to get that information to you. As part of the assessment that I have been doing since I have been here the just over 2 months, I have been engaged in a lot of the broader contexts, so as we move toward the weeds, which are necessary because the devil oftentimes is in the details, as to how we move positively forward, I promise that we will give a more specific answer back to you as to what that specific engagement is with our community colleges.

Mrs. CAMMACK. I appreciate that. I am going to redirect here to the RAND report that a lot of this hearing is centered around.

So, we know that this report entitled "Harassment, Discrimination on the Basis of Gender and Race Ethnicity in the FEMA Workforce," examined the climate of different levels of leadership within the agency. Many people found that their immediate supervisor and FEMA leadership, they had a more positive impression of immediate supervisors rather than the leadership. So, can you speak to the steps specifically that FEMA is taking in your office as well as Administrator Criswell to improve not just having a policy or perception, but meaningful change in garnering a more trustworthy leadership at the highest levels of FEMA?

We might be having technical difficulties.

Chairwoman Demings, I think we lost our witness.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Deputy Administrator Hooks, are you still with us?

OK. Staff has informed me that we have encountered technical issues. We will now go into recess until those issues are resolved. I ask that the Members please keep your cameras on, your microphones muted. We will notify you as soon as this issue is resolved.

Members, thank you so much for your patience. This is such an important topic. We will be back soon. Thank you.

[Recess]

Mr. HOOKS. Madam Chair, again we have—we are working through some technical issues. Are you able to hear my—

Chairwoman DEMINGS. OK. Let me do my countdown and we will proceed. Members, thank you so much.

Five, four, three, two, one. The Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness and Response will again come to order. We are out of recess.

Deputy Administrator, I believe that you were in the middle of answering questions. Please proceed.

Mr. HOOKS. Well, we actually froze while Representative Cammack was starting to—we actually froze while Representative Cammack was posing her question. So, if she can expand with—

Chairwoman DEMINGS. OK. Ranking Member, if you would please—

Mr. HOOKS. My apologies for asking the gentlewoman—

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Not a problem. Ranking Member, please go ahead. We will adjust the clock accordingly.

Mrs. CAMMACK. I appreciate that. Thank you. Thank you, Chairwoman Demings. Deputy Administrator Hooks, I know how frustrating it can be trying to get everything in the short period of time along with technical difficulties.

Really, the genesis of my question was as part of the findings with the RAND study that came out, there was a significant discrepancy between the trustworthiness and support of employees with their immediate supervisor versus the higher echelons of leadership within the agency. So, I was asking specifically what initiatives you in your office as well as the administrator's office is taking to really reestablish and pivot from the top to ensure that employees feel that they are supported and that that culture change is taking place all the way through all levels of the agency?

Mr. HOOKS. Again, thank you for—

Mrs. CAMMACK. I feel like we are in a karaoke bar.

Mr. HOOKS. Yes, yes, yes.

Mrs. CAMMACK. If it is helpful while we navigate some of these technical challenges, I am happy for you to issue a response in writing.

Mr. HOOKS. Thank you. We can certainly follow up. All right. I am hoping that we have it solved. Again, my deepest apologies, particularly on such a very important issue.

I would say this, is that, again, as I described, I came to FEMA approximately 2 months ago, but in my career in law enforcement and public safety in North Carolina, I have a proud record of dealing with issues of sexual harassment and discrimination. But beyond that, empowering the work force, so that women in particular can feel that they have a safe place to work, a place to thrive, a place to grow, and that they can contribute to the overall important mission of public safety and emergency management.

I certainly learned of the findings of the RAND report during the confirmation process and was deeply troubled by what I had read and described behaviors. But what I also learned is that FEMA has taken many strides. Administrator Criswell has led the way. She came to FEMA approximately a year before I arrived there and embedded in our Strategic Plan, we talked about earlier, the Chair-

woman talked about the Cultural Improvement Plan. Well, that Cultural Improvement Plan is now part of our overall Strategic Plan and is embedded in the fabric of what we do day-to-day, so that nobody thinks that this is some isolated program that we deal with issues of harassment and sexual misconduct within our agency, or any misconduct within the agency.

So, we want that strong thread woven throughout everything that we do. We have done things, such as requiring harassment training for all the employees and conducting listening sessions for FEMA staff; conducting exit interviews with people who have left staff. Because it has often been said that people sometimes don't leave organizations, that people leave people. So, we want to get at the heart as to why we are losing valuable employees.

I also think that as we improve the dynamics, the professionalism, and the diversity of FEMA that that will go a long way to ensuring that everyone feels that they are valued, that they have a place to thrive, whether they are in the minority, majority, whether there is gender, race, or ethnicity, that FEMA is here to serve the American public and to do it with distinction. I would demand no less of anybody that works around me and with me.

But I recognize that I am very up-front and frank with the staff. It is not enough that we have a female visionary at the lead of the agency or that I come in with my background and being an ethnic minority. This is an American issue and we must take it on together. We are up to that challenges and I have a history of holding supervisors accountable throughout the ranks to ensure that we have a healthy organization. Because if we are not healthy internally, we cannot begin to adequately implement programs proscribed by Congress.

Mrs. CAMMACK. I appreciate your answer and your thoroughness and your patience in navigating the technical challenges.

With that, Chairwoman Demings, I yield back.

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

Mr. PAYNE. Thank you, Madam Chair. Sir, in your testimony you state that compared to 2016 FEMA has had more than twice as many staff employed every day of the year for 4 years, and that FEMA must expand its approach to agency readiness and to National preparedness. Can you describe for the committee what this expanded approach consists of?

Mr. HOOKS. Yes, sir. Yes, sir. It is multifaceted. As we have improved our ability to hire within the local communities, that enhances our readiness because we are hiring individuals who are familiar with those communities that they serve. I think that that is a critical part of enhancing our readiness. We have individuals who are trusted voices in their communities, who come from those communities. Some of them may have even been disaster survivors themselves, so they are really in touch with those communities that they serve.

But that is not enough because we have to make sure that they are adequately trained and ready to provide the services. So, in the training program that I described earlier that we are enhancing in a very robust way to reach out to those new employees to ensure

that they have the skills that they need to immediately impact the communities in which they serve.

I am particularly in tune with this because what I have told valued staff through FEMA is that whereas I come in as the deputy director with over 3 decades of experience, I am a new employee, too. So, I am learning as I lead. So the challenge for them is to equip our new employees with the skills that they need to meet disaster survivors where they are.

We also have improved and we have been improving on our relationships with our emergency managers all across the Nation. I think that that is fostered by the experience of Administrator Criswell coming from a local agency and background, and I hope to add into that thought process as well, bringing a perspective of the States and territories to FEMA and combine it with that Federal expertise, with professional staff to drive our Nation forward.

So, all of these things go into our readiness. We have a complete condition that as part of their commitment is evaluating the readiness of our staff to ensure that they can respond effectively and efficiently to all hazards that may be presented to them. They are constantly working at evaluating where we are at and how we are doing and the inputs and after-action plans for every disaster, so that we can determine how we can do things better.

I also have experience because I was the executive civilian authority for the National Guard under the Governor's control in North Carolina. So I am relying on some experiences and the models that are in place with the National Guard as they have taken on the challenges of readiness in their Reserve work force as well.

Mr. PAYNE. Thank you for that. My second question, during our January work force hearing I spoke with GAO's Chris Currie and former Administrator Fugate about the burnout and mission impacts of rapid redeployments on employee performance and FEMA's ability to meet its mission. Twenty-twenty and 2021 included record-breaking disasters and strained the FEMA work force. How has FEMA dealt with back-to-back deployments during the past year to address burnout and improve employee performance?

Mr. HOOKS. Thank you, sir. Certainly understanding the experience and expertise that Mr. Fugate brings to the discussion, and FEMA has concurred with the recommendations made by the GAO in May 2020 concerning our work force and we agree with the challenges that are before us. So we want to ensure that we equip leaders with the knowledge and skills that they need to deploy the specific resources to the communities that are in need. So that we have to make smarter investments as to how we deploy to make sure that individuals, as much as possible, can get a rest in between the cycles. It is not unlike the many challenges that, again, the National Guard faces in how to continue to have a ready work force based on the number of missions before that.

So it begins with leadership, who understand that we have to develop our new and emerging staff, so that we are just not always calling up the same staff time and time again. We are bringing these people into the work force, so we have to equip them early with the skills, knowledge, and expertise early in their careers and give them an opportunity to grow, and with complete oversight be-

cause we still want the highest level of service to disaster survivors possible and not continually call on the same individuals.

We need to look within the agency, if there are certain topics within the agencies that have not deployed in a while and we have repeatedly been riding the same horse, so to speak. We need to continue to look at that as well.

Mr. PAYNE. Thank you. Yes, I think you need to project into the future based on 2021 that this is going to be the way it is moving into the future with, you know, continual redeployments. So you need to keep that in mind as you prepare for the future that this might be the standard, the usual of what is going to happen for the agency.

So, thank you, Madam Chair. With that, I will yield back.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. The gentleman's time has expired. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Louisiana, Mr. Higgins, for 5 minutes.

Mr. HIGGINS. I thank my friend and colleague Chairwoman Demings and Ranking Member Cammack. Thank you for holding today's follow-up hearing.

When a natural disaster happens, whether it is a hurricane or tornado, a winter storm, wild fire, the destruction is immediately felt by the community, by the families that live there, but these disasters often affect the country as well. As the community looks to recover, one significant issue is navigating the complexity of FEMA's disaster recovery programs. Southwest Louisiana is no stranger to destructive storms and we have vast experience. It is part of our culture working with State and Federal agencies to recover.

Still, the overall message that I hear from the citizens that I serve and the communities that I represent is quite negative regarding FEMA and their interactions with FEMA. They have delays in getting applications approved or lack of customer service. You know, we all recognize that COVID was a part of that, but it is still a reality we have to deal with. Navigating FEMA's bureaucracy has been very much a challenge for recovery for my State and the district that I serve.

While I appreciate FEMA putting together a Strategic Plan to address staffing issues, I am concerned that there is too much focus on issues like climate resilience while other needed areas of reform go unaddressed. In my opinion, FEMA should first hire the necessary staff to work through the backlog casework in public assistance applications for disaster-related reimbursements. Delays in this process are too frequent and can be detrimental to the success of a community's recovery mission.

I would like to mention to our witness here today, Mr. Hooks, I have had some very positive interactions with FEMA, so let me mention a compliment because it can work when we work together.

On October 5 last year, I delivered a letter to Ms. Criswell, your colleague, regarding some specific applications that had been languishing, shall we say, in the bureaucracy. Two days later, on October 7, we received a resolution for those things and the official announcement resolving those issues. So, I am going to ask for your help with this lady again.

We have some specific issues. The Port of Lake Charles has millions and millions of dollars, \$40-, \$50 million of recovery projects that are hung up, specific projects. I am going to ask our Chairlady to allow entry into the official record a letter from the Port of Lake Charles referencing those pending and languishing applications, and a letter from my office officially requesting specific assistance, which, again, we have had success with in the past with FEMA. Chairwoman DEMINGS. Without objection, so moved.

[The information follows:]

LETTER FROM THE LAKE CHARLES HARBOR & TERMINAL DISTRICT

February 22, 2022.

The Honorable CLAY HIGGINS,
U.S. House of Representatives, 424 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, DC
20515.

DEAR CONGRESSMAN HIGGINS: The Port of Lake Charles would like to provide an update on FEMA issues we have experienced while trying to recover from the devastating effects of Hurricane Laura and Hurricane Delta. Listed below are projects that have stalled in the FEMA review process. Most of these projects were submitted to you earlier, but unfortunately, we have made very little progress in resolving the problems we are having with FEMA. Most of these problems reside in the project review process at the Consolidated Resource Center (CRC) who has been an absolute roadblock and made it extremely difficult to get even the most basic of projects obligated. Below are three examples of the difficulties we have encountered:

- Project 163662—BT Ship Unloader No. 2—Konecranes/PAAP 428
 - The Port has decided not to replace this ship unloader at this time. We have requested a Section 428 PAAP project which will allow the Port to use the funds from this unloader on other projects. The engineering firm hired by the Port recommended throughout their report that the unloader should be decommissioned due to the extensive damage it received. It was not economically feasible to even attempt a repair and the unloader was scrapped. FEMA is now requesting an analysis to be completed on the cost to repair the unloader versus the cost to replace it. This FEMA 50 Percent Rule analysis would be impossible to conduct on a one-of-a-kind, expensive piece of machinery, especially since it has already been demolished and hauled off. The future decisions made by FEMA on the ship loaders and unloaders are the single largest threat to the successful recovery of the Port of Lake Charles and the surrounding economy.
 - Estimated amount of funding at stake: \$30–\$40 million dollars.
- Project 161512—Transit Shed 7
 - This building was damaged greater than 50 percent and should be replaced. FEMA first delayed this project by requiring a Consensus-Based Codes, Specifications, and Standards (CBCSS) analysis be completed on this building which wasn't required for the first year of this disaster. After submitting the CBCSS, the 50 percent request was approved by the CRC Validator at 74 percent damaged, as well as approved by their Peer Reviewer. It was in Mitigation when the project was "called back" because of a possible request for information (RFI). The CRC RFI requested that the cost of a slab be added to the estimate and the 50 percent calculation equation. Even though the slab was not a damaged element, and the Port was going to reuse the existing slab for the new building, we added the cost of a basic slab in order to move the project forward. This reduced the 50 percent calculation from 74 percent down to 62 percent. The CRC was still not satisfied with the slab cost and is now trying to engineer how the Port builds its structures. There seems to be a concerted effort and intent to keep increasing the cost of a new building which would cause the FEMA 50 Percent Rule calculation to fall below 50 percent. This would mean that the Port would not receive funding to replace a badly-damaged building.
 - Estimated amount of funding at stake: \$3–\$4 million dollars.
- Project 161516—City Docks Transit Shed 16
- Project 161519—City Docks Transit Shed 17
 - The FEMA CRC has stalled these two projects for months. The holdup has been that FEMA refuses to recognize that the badly damaged roofs should be replaced in their entirety, and not the piece-meal repair that they are pushing for. The Port has submitted two engineering reports to FEMA that clearly

state that both roofs should be replaced to maintain the structural integrity of the building. As a public State entity, the Port is following the professional guidance of the engineers and is replacing the roofs. This will keep the buildings safe for their tenants as well as to make certain that the buildings are insurable while avoiding any liability issues should the roofs not be replaced. FEMA has not done a physical site inspection on either building even though the Port has requested multiple times that they view the damaged buildings for themselves. They instead conducted a “virtual” site inspection using photographs. Although the FEMA site inspector stated that the method of repair as replacement in the comments of the site inspection report, the FEMA CRC has chosen to ignore those comments as well as both engineer’s reports. They instead have referenced a google earth image taken from approximately 450 miles above the earth. They have stated that there doesn’t “appear” to be enough damage to justify replacing the entire roof.

- Estimated amount of funding at stake: \$6–\$8 million dollars.

We certainly appreciate any assistance you and your staff can provide regarding these projects. Please feel free to contact me any time to discuss them.

Yours Truly,

RICHERT L. SELF,
Executive Director.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Chairwoman. The Port of Lake Charles, if they can’t recover, the economic recovery of the entire region is impacted and, indeed, the Nation. Lake Charles is the epicenter for energy export, for LNG, for the entire Nation.

So, I ask for the indulgence of our witness today. I am asking for the Consolidated Resource Center to take specific action on these matters that will be delivered to your office today. Deputy Administrator Hook, I very much appreciate you being here today. I have enjoyed working with your boss, Administrator Criswell. I really hope that we can resolve these things. We must. The economic prosperity of the entire State and, indeed, the Nation is impacted based upon our performance here together.

You will be receiving my official questions for the record in the next couple of days. I look forward to our staffs working together. I very much appreciate Chairwoman Demings and Ranking Member Cammack for holding today’s hearing. I yield, Madam Chair.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. The gentleman yields back. The Chair now recognizes the gentlewoman from New Jersey, Mrs. Watson Coleman, for 5 minutes.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Well, thank you, Chairwoman, for bringing us together. Thank you to the Ranking Member and, of course, to you, Mr. Hooks. I have got a number of questions. I am probably going to run through them. You might want to write them down.

First what I want to do is to bring attention to you a letter that I sent to Ms. Criswell on February 14 on behalf of all of the New Jersey delegation. We were asking, writing FEMA to expedite its information to HUD, so that HUD could allocate the money for the disasters which occurred in 2021. I would like to know the status of that letter. I would like to know is there a deficiency in staffing, even in the administration of FEMA, that would somehow delay a response to a request as of this nature.

I also would like unanimous consent, Madam Chair, to enter this letter into the record.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Without objection, so ordered.

[The information follows:]

February 14, 2022.

DEANNE CRISWELL,
*Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency, 500 C Street, SW, Wash-
 ington, DC 20472.*

DEAR ADMINISTRATOR CRISWELL: We write today regarding the status of data the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) needs from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in order to allocate funding appropriated by Congress for communities impacted by 2021 disasters. We ask that you provide this data to HUD as expeditiously as possible so that this funding can get to the people in New Jersey and other States that desperately need it to recover from the devastation of Hurricane Ida.

As you know, the Extending Government Funding and Delivering Emergency Assistance Act passed by Congress and signed into law by President Biden on September 30, 2021 appropriated \$5 billion in CDBG-DR/MIT funds for major disasters that occurred in 2020 and 2021. On November 1, 2021, HUD announced the allocation of more than \$2 billion to States impacted by 2020 disasters. The remaining funds would be used to address the unmet need from disasters that occurred in 2021, but months later, funding has still not been allocated. It is our understanding that HUD requires data from FEMA in order to calculate the allocation to New Jersey and other States affected by Hurricane Ida. We urge you to provide this data to HUD as soon as possible.

Many reconstruction and recovery efforts in New Jersey cannot commence until HUD allocates this funding, and the months of delay have had a deleterious impact on the families and communities in our State. Many of our constituents were displaced when their homes were destroyed by the storm, including hundreds living in public housing. Housing shortages compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic have left many residents in hotels and motels at Government expense to this day, with no expectation of when they will be able to return to their homes. Under any circumstances, this uncertainty would be difficult to bear, but during the current pandemic, the impact is magnified. Moreover, with each passing day, the mold and water damage to the impacted properties, as well as the expense to mitigate the damage, only increases.

We appreciate all that FEMA has done already to help New Jersey residents get back on their feet, but we need a better understanding of when these calculations for relief awards will be completed. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter, and please do not hesitate to contact our offices if you have questions or wish to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

CORY A. BOOKER,
United States Senator
 ROBERT MENENDEZ,
United States Senator
 FRANK PALLONE, JR.,
Member of Congress
 TOM MALINOWSKI,
Member of Congress
 BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN,
Member of Congress
 DONALD PAYNE, JR.,
Member of Congress
 JOSH GOTTHEIMER,
Member of Congress
 MIKIE SHERRILL,
Member of Congress
 DONALD NORCROSS,
Member of Congress
 ALBIO SIRES,
Member of Congress
 ANDY KIM,
Member of Congress
 BILL PASCRELL, JR.,
Member of Congress.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Thank you, ma'am.

I understand there is something like 22,000 positions already in FEMA. I am interested in a couple of things.

No. 1 is I am interested in the kind of skills you are looking for in who you are hiring and at what levels. No. 2, I am looking to understand how you are approaching the better numbers in diversity in leadership. Because the information that I have suggested there is something like 71 percent of the leadership in FEMA is White and male, and that certainly isn't a reflection of, (A), the places in which there have been multiple devastations, but, (B), our country as a whole. So, I would like very much to understand what we are doing specifically and how successful FEMA has been in greater diversity.

The last thing I would like to understand is do you believe that there is an assessment being done on streamlining your process? Because sometimes people get very confused about how to actually access resources, what resources they are entitled to, et cetera.

Last, I am not sure how many questions you are going to be able to answer, but I do want to say that I am also grateful to FEMA because FEMA has stood in the gap in some very important areas in New Jersey, and helped us through some very devastating times.

So, while I ask these pointed questions, in no way, shape, or form do I want you to think that I don't have an appreciation and a respect for the work that you all do.

I don't know if you want to answer those questions later or what.

Mr. HOOKS. Well, it would be a combination of things, but, again, thank you for your questions and thank you for your unwavering support for our mission and our work force.

I don't have specific insight into the specific letter that you have written to Administrator Criswell, but I will certainly loop back in with her on that. I do expect that a number of issues that we are working with HUD on the other issues, I expect that resolution will come to bear soon.

Concerning diversity, overall FEMA's work force, it is pretty diverse, but as you move up the ranks that diversity wanes. There are certain levels in FEMA that do not have the diversity that reflect the diversity that we would like to see, you know, because it doesn't reflect the rich diversity of our Nation.

Some of those positions are forward-facing in our disaster response. So one of the areas that I have tasked specifically, you know, many of our professional career is looking at what are either some barriers that prevent or—women or minorities from moving toward those forward-facing positions of authority out in the public. What can we do to foster a better culture of diversity?

Again, it is not enough for the agency lead to be a female and for me to be a racial minority, but I have seen at the top that the appointments and the hires made, appointments by the President and the hires made by Administrator Criswell, is that we have a very diverse leadership at the present time. But that needs to transcend throughout the ranks and the middle has to meet what we see at the very top and what we are bringing into our work force.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Thank you, Mr. Hooks. I would very much like to know the specifics of that, the categories in which you have the diversity, the categories in which you are looking. I still

very much would like to understand the kind of skill sets you all are looking for in FEMA at every level just as information so that I can be more helpful to you in the future.

With that, I yield back. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. The gentlewoman's time has expired. The Chair now recognizes the gentlewoman from Iowa, Mrs. Miller-Meeks, for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS. Thank you very much, Madam Chair Demings and Ranking Member Cammack. I thank you for bringing us together for this important testimony.

Iowa is certainly, like Louisiana, as we heard from Representative Higgins, is no stranger to natural disasters, be they floods, be they tornados, be they derechos. We have certainly had our share of those. I appreciate the comments and the questions in addressing the work force in FEMA and workplace shortages and labor shortages that you have available. Then also, the diversity of talent that is necessary.

One of the other things that we do in Homeland Security is cybersecurity. We address cybersecurity. We certainly have had many hearings on that in the past year, this legislative session. We have seen cybersecurity attacks with the Colonial Pipeline, which tremendously affected the Eastern Seaboard, and we have also seen the JBS attacks, which affected my own region as I have meat producers within my Congressional district.

So, I think, increasingly, the public both on a personal level for their own security of their own financial records and on a National security level are very interested in cybersecurity. In your testimony you highlighted the importance of having professionals who can facilitate data and information sharing within FEMA's IT infrastructure. The fiscal year 2022 President's budget request includes an increase of 20 positions, 10 full-time employees, and \$26.7 million to support FEMA's cybersecurity program.

Given the past issues FEMA has had with safeguarding personal information, what specific initiatives will FEMA be focusing on and how is FEMA working with other DHS components to strengthen its IT work force? Do you have the facility to hire the types of people with the expertise that are needed?

Mr. HOOKS. Thank you, Madam Representative, and thank you for the question. A very poignant and timely question at this time in our history.

You know, we have often been saying that cyber threats are emerging threats. My view is that it is no longer an emerging threat. It is a persistent threat and one that impacts both Government and non-Government and civilians alike.

We are pleased to see the positions being made available through the offering of the budget. There has been a greater emphasis within our own IT infrastructure division to improve cybersecurity. We want to make sure that we protect our systems and we also need to double down and protect the ability to protect personal identifiable information for those impacted, for disaster survivors because we don't want them victimized a second time.

We are working very closely with CISA, who is a sister agency within the Department of Homeland Security, and following all those advisements that CISA leads on to make us a more protected

and resilient Nation. That also applies to us because we can't effectively deliver on our mission if we have gaps that make us vulnerable to the many threats that are out there, be it from individuals, criminal organizations, or nation-states. So that is something I am very mindful of with my history as the State homeland security advisor in North Carolina. That is something that we talk with all our State partners about and it is an emphasis of our grant programs moving forward as proscribed by the Secretary for our homeland security grants.

So we are very mindful and take long systems in promulgating that idea to our local and territorial partners.

Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS. Do you believe that your hiring processes will permit you to hire the individuals with the expertise needed in a timely fashion or are there barriers that we need to consider modifying?

Mr. HOOKS. The barrier is always competing against the private sector because they face these challenges as well. So issues of compensation and all of those things, those are sometimes things that are out of FEMA's direct hands. But what I can have a direct impact on is that people see this as an opportunity to serve our Nation in a mighty way that goes above and beyond salary considerations, so that they are a part of something larger in our FEMA mission and, again, in a workplace where they would be valued and they know that their contributions are lending toward a safer America. But compensation helps.

Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS. Thank you very much. I thank you for your diligence in both protecting the system and people's personal information.

So, thank you, Chair Demings. I yield back my time.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. The gentlewoman yields back. The Chair now recognizes the gentlewoman from Texas, Ms. Jackson Lee, for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. My pleasure to have the opportunity, Madam Chair. Thank you so very much.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Members are reminded to please mute your microphones. Please mute.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. So to be on this hearing to discuss with the deputy administrator the importance of recruitment, training, and retention.

First, I would like to say, Deputy Administrator Hooks, that being in a targeted disaster region, certainly the region is not a disaster because of the wonderful people, but it is because we are subject to natural disasters really almost on an annual basis. So we have ourselves interacted with those persons that have FEMA, most of them, I understand, temporary employees.

I do want to say that they have come energetic, with a great desire to be helpful and with a great deal of passion. I am reminded of Hurricane Harvey when they literally had to be with us for months and Hurricane Katrina when we moved a quarter of a million people out of Louisiana, in particular New Orleans, and they came to the Houston/Harris County area. They literally had to be with us for a number of years, so I appreciate the work that is being done.

I am going to pose my question along the lines of legislation that I am introducing or have introduced. With a nod to the Chairwoman I am hoping that we will have an opportunity for a hearing dealing with H.R. 3060, the FEMA Modernization Act, where we are looking at—a number of members are looking at some of these issues: Improving the Fast Response Office; having ombudsmen; establishing a new natural disaster medical triage capacity; establishing a program to provide education and job training; provide for accurate reporting on deaths and missing persons; and collecting data.

I say that to say that that means an increase in FEMA staffing, employees of many different skills. So, let me start by your thoughts about developing a permanent staff that deals with disasters. My understanding is that they are recruited for each disaster, so I am interested in your thoughts about that.

Then I am also interested in your staffing of individuals that are able to deal with the multigenerational population and multilingual population that come upon during disasters. Would you start with that, Administrator Hooks?

Mr. HOOKS. Yes, ma'am. Thank you for your time and attention to the many issues that face FEMA. I am certainly aware that FEMA staff upon my arrival here have been educated in the vein that they were working—

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Staff being—

Mr. HOOKS [continuing]. With your staff on potential legislation. We are committed to continue to work with your staff and you and any member of staff to advance the modernization of FEMA.

I have seen in my brief time here a number of staff that have moved from being a local hire to being—to move on into a full-time career. That is when I talked earlier of creating that pipeline, we need to create that pipeline of local community hires that are vested in those communities, that understand those communities, and that is one of those pipelines, where you have to make those investments in those skills and abilities. Because FEMA does have a large mission set, and so those may be intake, those may be planning, and all those. So there are a number of variety of skills that need to be taught to new hires, so that they can avail themselves to full-time employment with FEMA. So we do have vacancies and we try to fill them that way.

Our outreach to technical and community colleges, as described by the Ranking Member, and I promise to get her some more additional information about what specifics FEMA is doing with that is similarly important as well as our outreach to HBCUs. Because as we reach those organizations that have a mind's eye on serving underserved communities, we can more greatly impact our Nation.

Again, they come with a variety of skill sets. Sometimes they have a skill set or hard skills about learning how to use the various systems, but they can also be soft skills on how to communicate with the public. You know, having I wouldn't necessarily call it a skill, but a heart for people and empathy and to meet people where they are.

Also, all of this flows together, none of it works in a vacuum, is that we have to tie this into our readiness cycle, so that people know that if I go to FEMA that, yes, I can and am subject to be

employed, but there will be times for rest and restoration. So we are making assessments on their readiness. We are making assessments to support them for their mental and physical health, so that they can continue to support the communities that we must reach all across the country.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Thank you. There was another question, Madam Chair, but I don't know whether he heard the question on intergenerational staffing to work with people of all ages.

Mr. HOOKS. Madam Chair? I am not able to hear the Chairwoman.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Madam Chair? We are not hearing you.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. I am sorry. Can you hear me now?

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Yes.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. OK. I would ask that the deputy administrator please submit the answer to Ms. Jackson Lee's question in writing.

The Chair now recognizes—

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Thank you.

Chairwoman DEMINGS [continuing]. The gentleman from—thank you. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from New York, Mr. Garbarino, for 5 minutes.

Mr. GARBARINO. Thank you, Chairwoman. Thank you to the witness for coming here today.

I have a follow-up question with what my colleague from Iowa was asking regarding cybersecurity. We talked about what FEMA was doing for its cyber programs. But Chairwoman Clarke and I just recently passed a State and local cybersecurity grant program which, when implemented, it is about a billion dollars. We got it signed into law. It is imperative, increasing resilience in our communities, especially in the light of recent attacks from Russia and other foreign adversaries.

FEMA is supposed to work closely with CISA in the implementation of this bill. Do you believe FEMA has the work force, the appropriate adequate personnel needed to implement this program? You know, how can we be more helpful in any coordination between FEMA and CISA in ensuring that this grant program runs pretty smoothly?

Mr. HOOKS. Thank you, sir. I certainly appreciate the question, Mr. Representative.

The Homeland Security grant and cyber grants in particular are extremely helpful to our State, territorial, and local partners. The administration of those grants is critically important in that we adequately communicate to our local partners. We are well-positioned and currently working diligently with CISA on those very issues and the administration of those grants.

Under the common authority of the Secretary of Homeland Security, both agencies are committed to delivering for our Nation on those grants as well because we certainly understand the importance. There are many communities that simply cannot fortify their own cybersecurity posture without that life-sustaining funding for those grants. So I am deeply appreciative.

We do have the staff to execute upon those grant priorities as well. The communities are certainly in need and I am sure they are certainly—will be certainly appreciative of those funding dollars

getting down to those communities to help them with their cybersecurity.

Mr. GARBARINO. I appreciate that answer. Thank you very much. Again, if we can be any more helpful in making sure that this program and any other programs with cyber runs more smoothly, please let us know.

On a separate note, in your testimony you discussed the role that FEMA plays in strengthening the emergency management work force across the country. My district, Long Island, suffered immensely from Superstorm Sandy almost 10 years ago and many—and it is sad to say this, but many are still rebuilding their homes and businesses, you know, we still haven't even fixed half the roads. As hurricane seasons continue to batter the communities year after year, can you discuss what specific ways FEMA is helping emergency management teams at the State and local level to help increase resilience to mitigate the impacts of future storms like Sandy?

Mr. HOOKS. Yes, sir. One of the seminal ways that FEMA can be of assistance beyond just the transmission of funding is being well-partnered and understanding those communities. FEMA has engaged over the last few years what we call the FIT program, FEMA Integration program, where we have FEMA employees embedded with State emergency managers all across the country to help better understand their needs. We listen to those State directors and that is an on-going process of what they need to help augment, not supplant, but augment, their ability to mitigate disasters before they start.

We certainly recognize that an investment on the front end of \$1 will save \$6 on the back end. So we lean in heavily toward those hazard mitigation investments on the front end and maintain healthy and robust partnerships is our fervent endeavor throughout the entire process and, again, coming back to FEMA's mission to helping people before, during, and after the storm. So we have that three-tiered mission that requires us to be there with our partners on blue-sky days, in the planning and the execution and anticipation of a storm, the storm response, and the recovery. I understand that the recovery sometimes can be extremely frustrating because it never can come soon enough for disaster survivors. You know that in New Jersey. I knew that in North Carolina. I am thankful that the entire committee is concerned with it.

Mr. GARBARINO. Thank you very much. Chairwoman, I yield back.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. The gentleman yields back. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Green, for 5 minutes.

Mr. GREEN. Thank you, Madam Chair. Am I audible?

Chairwoman DEMINGS. Yes, you are.

Mr. GREEN. OK, thank you much. I thank the administrator for appearing today. I greatly appreciate this opportunity because there are many things that are of concern to me, so I will move as expeditiously as possible.

Let us start with linguistics. I have one of the most diverse districts in the country. We have the ballot printed in 4 languages: English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Chinese. When we have these

unfortunate circumstances, let us call them acts of God, I think legally they are called that in many circles, when we have these acts of God, we oftentimes find ourselves with people coming to our office who want help, but they don't seem to be able to have someone to help them in a language that they are familiar with. We have to find people sometimes to assist.

But what do you do or how do we help you with the linguistics aspects of this, please?

Mr. HOOKS. Well, thank you, Representative. Certainly an important area that we must discuss because if we can't effectively communicate with the people in need, we can't effectively deliver the programs to the people that oftentimes need them the most and who have been impacted the most.

I would say that overall, as we look at the diversity of FEMA, that nearly 13 percent of our staff speak Spanish. So, we have to be smart about our deployment so that we really understand those communities of deployment, so that we deploy the sufficient number of Spanish-speaking and culturally competent individuals to deal with those particular unique needs. Actually, the 13 percent is in line with the percentage of U.S. population, but understanding that you are talking about a more concentrated population in the areas that you so nobly serve.

At our Disaster Recovery Centers, we have translators available not just for Spanish, but for a number of languages, including sign language. If you don't have someone on-site that is well-versed in a particular language, we are able to set up a virtual call to be able to better communicate with them. You know, if COVID has prevented any one positive, save for the technical difficulties we have had today, we have learned to utilize the virtual platforms for greater engagement. So we will continue to actually pick up lessons learned through tragedies and providing virtual platforms and communications and translations for disaster survivors.

Mr. GREEN. Mr. Deputy Director, if I may, I greatly appreciate your answer. I have two other areas that I would like to get into, so let me move quickly and simply ask this question. When you are in need in a given area of persons to work on a given disaster, how can I impact that process by recommending people, helping you to apply personnel from the area who will understand not only the language, but they know a little bit about the geography? There may be other things that they will know that you just don't get by having a person who speaks the language. So, is there a way for us to help you with that? If there is, could you tell me quickly because I have two other areas?

Mr. HOOKS. Yes, sir. Probably the best way, the most expedient way is to ensure that the State and local emergency management knows what those local resources are because they will be in tune with the entire community and can relate that to us.

Mr. GREEN. All right. Thank you very much. Let us talk quickly about signing bonuses. I was at an event just recently with another member of the administration and it was a great event. We had people who actually work for the Government explaining some of the problems that they are having in terms of recruitment. Apparently, at Houston, there are signing bonuses being given to persons in a given area in the private sector. The public sector can't match

those signing bonuses. Is there something that we can do to help you there?

I understand loyalty to country and persons want to be of help, but those signing bonuses are quite appealing, Mr. Administrator. I am just curious as to is there something we can do to help you with that?

Mr. HOOKS. Yes, sir. We are totally reliant upon the appropriations that are allotted to us from—

Mr. GREEN. Something has happened to the quality of your voice. I can't hear you.

Mr. HOOKS. All right I am sorry for the technical difficulties, but we are reliant upon Congressional approval and Congressional authorities. So any discussion that you would have that would help benefit us in attracting a greater work force, and that includes compensation, we will welcome those discussions.

Mr. GREEN. OK. I have 2 seconds, 1 second, and I won't get to my last topic. I will ask that I be permitted to send something to you in writing. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Chairwoman DEMINGS. The gentleman yields back. With that, I want to thank the deputy administrator for his valuable testimony. I want to thank the Members for their questions.

The Members of the subcommittee may have additional questions and I know that you do for the witness. We ask that you respond expeditiously in writing to those questions.

The Chair reminds Members that the committee record will remain open for 10 business days.

Without objection, the subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:20 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

QUESTIONS FROM CHAIRWOMAN VAL DEMINGS FOR ERIK A. HOOKS

Question 1. In January, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) testified before the subcommittee that staffing shortages in FEMA's contracting workforce have exacerbated challenges the agency already faces in disaster response and recovery. Post-disaster contracts are a key part of the recovery process and can sometimes last for years after the disaster occurs. FEMA needs to have a permanent, full-time workforce of contracting officials to manage these contracts and ensure the billions of dollars allocated to disaster recovery are spent properly. According to GAO, 8 of FEMA's 10 regional offices, only have 1 full-time permanent contracting official. What is FEMA's plan to increase contracting staff across its regional offices?

Answer. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) continues to focus on the mission-essential requirements of hiring the highest level of talent within the acquisition community to populate our workforce of contracting professionals. During the past year, FEMA's Office of the Chief Component Procurement Officer (OCCPO) established a hiring and retention team with objectives of recruiting talent, retaining talent, and assessing the work environment to assure that it is most conducive to producing opportunities for professional growth and mission success. OCCPO has been filling vacancies on a continuous basis and has improved its attrition rate from 8 percent to 5 percent within the last year since starting the hiring and retention team in late 2020. FEMA's chief component procurement officer (CCPO) has also implemented a mission-focused process that allows the entire organization of contracting personnel to be utilized across all branches of the organization, as well as contracting personnel in the Regions, to accomplish mission-essential needs during steady-state, disasters, and emergencies. As it is the responsibility of the CCPO to ensure successful execution of contracts in the face of emergencies, disaster response, disaster recovery, and post-disaster across the agency, the aforementioned approach delivers the ability to manage multiple contingency situations simultaneously regardless of the duty location of such staff. FEMA's CCPO has placed heavy emphasis on increasing the level of technical proficiency within the agency's contracting workforce, the number of personnel, and the level of engagement with all 10 regional administrators to provide proper oversight and stewardship of taxpayers' dollars and execute the agency's mission.

Question 2a. FEMA is responding to more disasters and crises while still maintaining past emergency management practices. In the January hearing, Former Administrator Craig Fugate noted that FEMA's disaster recovery operations can take decades to finish, which is concerning given that FEMA has a history of operating in a workforce deficit.

What updates is FEMA considering to its disaster recovery model to make the agency more efficient, given workforce constraints?

Question 2b. How is FEMA leveraging technology to address disaster recovery operations, ensure efficiency of the existing available workforce, and prevent future workforce deficit?

Question 2c. What specific steps or supports are needed to complete long-standing disaster recovery operations, which would allow FEMA staff to transition to more recent and future disasters?

Answer. As climate change increases the frequency and severity of natural disasters, and with new and emergent threats such as COVID-19, FEMA has had to flex our approach to maintain our ability to execute our mission. FEMA constantly evaluates and adjusts our workforce strength, training, and composition to be better-positioned to help people before, during, and after disasters.

FEMA is taking specific actions to maximize resources and ensure that our processes and technology make recovery as simple as possible. First, we have looked to centralize technical and administrative resources to be able to support multiple ongoing disasters concurrently. For example, our Consolidated Resource Centers

(CRCs) enabled us to support COVID-19 disaster declarations in every State and territory and all Tribal nations with disaster declarations simultaneously. Second, we constantly review and improve our processes and technology to enable State, local, Tribal, and territorial governments to drive their own recoveries and navigate our process. Third, we are in the process of assessing the delivery of the Public Assistance (PA) program and CRC processes to look for additional opportunities to simplify the program for applicants.

We also focus deliberately on the training and professional development of our workforce to set our staff up for success in helping individuals and communities recover. In addition to standard, position-specific training, we have worked to implement leadership growth and development programs. For example, the Public Assistance Professional Development Academy consists of 120 hours of interactive training that enhances the programmatic knowledge, customer service, quality control measures, and leadership traits required for successful program delivery.

FEMA is also reviewing and adjusting its force structure, regionally and Nationally, to ensure FEMA has the necessary personnel to better support the execution of the PA program from declaration of an emergency or disaster to the completion of recovery operations for all impacted communities. This will allow the agency to plan for and provide the appropriate staffing support for all phases of recovery while also maintaining a ready workforce to execute future events. This also includes recruiting new employees and filling vacant positions that support long-term recovery operations, particularly positions in the appeals and audits sections where closing disasters can see significant delays.

Question 3a. Last month, the subcommittee held a hearing with stakeholders from the American Jewish community about how crucial the Nonprofit Security Grant Program is for bolstering security for their houses of worship and other religious communities. However, during the hearing witnesses described how smaller synagogues and other religious communities had difficulty applying to the program.

As we are nearing a new grant cycle, is FEMA considering providing additional outreach for houses of worship given the recent rise of threats against houses of worship?

Question 3b. Given the recent spate of bomb threats against Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), what outreach has FEMA conducted to ensure colleges and universities are aware of their eligibility for the Nonprofit Security Grant program?

Answer. As part of our on-going efforts to ensure that all nonprofit organizations in need of security resources have access to this funding, and in support of Executive Order 13985: Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government, FEMA is conducting extensive outreach to underserved and marginalized communities to provide information and technical assistance in preparation for the upcoming fiscal year 2022 application period.

- A Technical Assistance Webinar Series began on February 18, 2022, and will run through April 1, 2022, to provide nonprofit organizations information on what they can do now in anticipation of the fiscal year 2022 Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NSGP) application cycle opening this spring. Additional Technical Assistance Webinars will be scheduled and delivered throughout the open application period.
- FEMA has led or participated in over 37 virtual outreach sessions focused on the nonprofit community, underserved communities, and vulnerable populations in preparation for the fiscal year 2022 grants cycle:
 - Seventeen of these were FEMA-hosted events, and 20 events were hosted or co-hosted by other Federal partners, including the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, the DHS Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ).
 - These sessions have reached over 7,800 individual participants representing over 2,700 associations/organizations as of March 15, 2022.
- FEMA has been proactively engaging with and has completed specific outreach sessions, technical assistance webinars, and information-sharing events with the Jewish Federation of North America, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), and the Council on American-Islamic Relations. Additional follow-on events have also been scheduled with the Jewish Federation of North America and the Faith-Based Information Sharing and Analysis Organization in late March and early April.
- To expand NSGP information access even more broadly, FEMA has partnered with the DHS Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships to distribute NSGP materials (fact sheets, Federal resource links, outreach slides,

etc.) to over 63,000 individuals through their National inter-faith distribution list.

- In partnership with the DOJ Community Relations Service, FEMA also provided an overview of the NSGP during 4 Protecting Places of Worship Forums, reaching faith leaders within the Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Baptist, and interfaith communities.
- Finally, to provide additional customer service capability for nonprofit organizations and houses of worship stakeholders, FEMA created a NSGP-specific email inbox (FEMA-NSGP@fema.dhs.gov) used to address stakeholder questions and disseminate information.
 - Since its establishment, there have been over 4,000 email transactions, with an average of 50–80 transactions per week.

Question 4a. The Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) and the State Homeland Security Grant Program have proven invaluable in protecting our communities from terrorism. While the Biden administration is doing a better job of communicating with stakeholders about changes to the National priority areas compared to the previous administration, we continue to hear applicants' concerns about meeting the requirements and the effectiveness of the National priority areas.

Can you describe some of the steps that FEMA has taken to conduct additional outreach and engagement with stakeholders on the National priority areas for the fiscal year 2022 application period?

Question 4b. Please describe how is FEMA considering stakeholder feedback on the effectiveness of the National priority areas?

Answer. FEMA held a series of 12 listening sessions with a variety of stakeholders in April and May 2021 to collect feedback on the preparedness grant programs and National Priority Areas (NPAs). Through these listening sessions, we learned that participants were supportive of NPAs but desired greater flexibility in how grant funding could be allocated across them. FEMA used this feedback to help inform priority and policy recommendations made to the DHS Secretary for the fiscal year 2022 programs. Our fiscal year 2022 guidance continues to require a minimum 30 percent spend on the NPAs. This year grant recipients can allocate 18 percent of the required spend across the NPAs in a way that aligns with their jurisdiction's specific needs and gaps rather than DHS prescribing a required spend for all 30 percent of this requirement.

In addition to the above feedback sessions, FEMA facilitated a discussion between grant recipients and a panel of subject-matter experts to:

- Explain what they considered effective project examples and the type of information they looked for during their reviews of NPA projects;
- Discuss resources available to assist applicants and recipients with developing projects under each NPA; and
- Hold an open question-and-answer session with stakeholders.

FEMA provided a summary of the panel discussion and resource links were provided to our stakeholders in January 2022.

With the recent passage of the fiscal year 2022 Omnibus, and the DHS Secretary's final decisions on fiscal year 2022 program changes, FEMA held outreach calls with stakeholders the week of March 28 to provide an overview of the approved changes in advance of the Notice of Funding Opportunity release. This will ensure applicants can have as much time as possible to prepare before the application period officially opens this spring. On April 6, FEMA also provided the Homeland Security Grant Program (HSGP) key changes, frequently asked questions, and fact sheet documents to help applicants get started on developing their projects.

In addition, FEMA is currently hosting a series of webinars featuring subject-matter experts across the Department to focus on each of the fiscal year 2022 NPAs. These webinars are providing an in-depth review of:

- Specific DHS areas of concern and how each of the fiscal year 2022 NPAs was determined,
- How to use HSGP funding to effectively develop projects for these NPAs,
- Additional resources available from across DHS specific to these NPAs.

Question 5. In your testimony, you state "In alignment with our Strategic Plan, FEMA is working to recruit individuals from underrepresented communities including through partnering with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and the American Indian Higher Education Consortium of Tribal Colleges and Universities to create hiring pipelines into the field of emergency management."

Please provide additional details on your plan to liaise with HBCUs and other Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), including which schools FEMA plans to partner, the frequency of contact with schools, and efforts to liaise with small- and medium-sized institutions.

Answer. Regarding HBCU and other Minority Serving Institutions (MSI) recruitment and outreach, the FEMA recruitment team is currently working with the HBCU Emergency Management Workforce Consortium. The HBCU Consortium consists of administrators, researchers, and professors from various HBCUs with the goal to implement Emergency Management Community Emergency Response Team training and experience on HBCU Campuses. Howard University is leading this initiative. HBCUs involved include:

- Howard University,
- Grambling State University,
- Florida A&M University,
- Morris Brown College,
- Jackson State University,
- Elizabeth City State University,
- Winston Salem State University, and
- Dillard University.

We expect additional HBCUs to join in the future. The Consortium meets monthly, and this engagement allows the FEMA recruitment team to expand outreach to the HBCUs involved.

FEMA's recruitment team has also partnered with DHS to deliver HBCU-focused student webinars and career fairs. It is currently collaborating with Rutgers University's Minority Serving Institution Research Center (which has outreach to over 700 MSIs) to host a FEMA webinar with the goal to increase outreach to more MSIs across the Nation.

The recruitment team has attended various HBCU- and other MSI-hosted/focused careers fairs (e.g., Atlanta University Consortium, White House Initiative on HBCUs, HSI Career Collaborative Career Fair). We also utilize Handshake, the No. 1 on-line job board used by employers to advertise job opportunities to students and alumni to target HBCUs and other MSIs to advertise positions and virtual informational sessions.

In addition, in coordination with the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, FEMA is planning to increase outreach and recruitment to Tribal Institutions and host virtual webinars, advertise job and student opportunities, and build relationships with Tribal Colleges and Universities and relate Tribal organizations. FEMA is also currently posting job opportunities on NativeHire.org, an on-line job board platform that focuses on Native American job seekers.

QUESTIONS FROM HONORABLE CLAY HIGGINS FOR ERIK A. HOOKS

Question 1. Local individuals and companies are often the best contractors in disaster response since they are also affected by the catastrophe at hand. Would you agree with this assessment? How has FEMA made an effort to work locally and with small businesses? Do you believe there needs to be a stronger effort to do so? Shouldn't this be especially true for HUB zones?

Answer. FEMA agrees that local companies are often great sources for essential supplies and services during disaster response and recovery operations. However, when responding to disasters, experience has demonstrated that FEMA's use of advance contracts is the most effective approach to managing the immediate and critical need to stabilize a disaster area in a manner that prevents further loss of life and property damage. Advance contracts also provide the capability for FEMA to rapidly deliver goods or services to support emergency response and recovery efforts for all survivors, including local vendors and contractors, within the impacted area.

When it is most practicable, FEMA transitions to local contractors with the intent to stimulate the local economy of the impacted area. The Stafford Act ensures local businesses are given preference during emergencies and provides for local area set-asides to ensure that local contractors in disaster areas are given preferences to Federal contracts in response to a major disaster or emergency. FEMA's OCCPO is committed to using local firms in disaster areas to the maximum extent practicable as set forth in FAR 26.204, and 42 U.S.C. 5150(b)(1). Additionally, OCCPO continuously conducts market research and hosts vendor engagements within the small business community to proactively identify responsible contractors to support the FEMA mission, also helping to ensure FEMA meets DHS's small business goals annually.

FEMA works diligently with its internal and external stakeholders to ensure procurement opportunities are available for members of underserved communities, including HUBZones, to the maximum extent practical by providing outreach, training, and resources on how to do business with the Federal Government. For example, FEMA's Industry Liaison Program, in collaboration with contracting personnel from each Region, meets proactively and regularly with Minority Business Develop-

ment Councils, the Association of Procurement Technical Assistance Centers, and local Small Business Administration Offices to increase knowledge of FEMA programs and opportunities in the local area and future requirements.

Question 2. Crosby Government Solutions, located in Houma, LA was contracted to conduct emergency response following Hurricane Ida. Some of their workers, themselves, were displaced due to this disaster. Their compassion and first-hand experience of the tragedy meant they went above and beyond for those they were servicing. Do you believe utilizing local contractors allows for a better response for individuals needs when an emergency occurs?

Answer. FEMA is committed to utilizing local firms within the disaster area during the response and recovery phases of the disaster to the greatest extent practicable. FEMA is also focused on stabilizing the disaster area as quickly as possible to prevent further loss of life and property damage, and the proven solution to doing so is the immediate use of advance contracts at the onset of the disaster, followed by a transition to local firms as soon as feasible after stabilization. FEMA has a requirement within all contracts awarded to large businesses to meet a set of small business goals specific to that contract. The FEMA small business subcontracting goal for this year is 43 percent, a goal that has increased over the years and which FEMA continues to meet and exceed each year since fiscal year 2017.

Prior to the start of the annual hurricane season, FEMA's CCPO meets with advance contract holders to discuss, among other things, small business goals. This is done to ensure the agency proactively engages and assists current contractors to continuously develop relationships with other small businesses contractors that provide goods and services in disaster-prone areas as a subcontractor. This approach benefits the small business community, as mission execution gained as a subcontractor increases the small business's technical experience and past performance history for future contracting opportunities as a prime vendor. In addition, the Stafford Act ensures local businesses are given preference during emergencies and provides for local area set-asides to ensure that responsible contractors in disaster areas are given preferences to Federal contracts in response to a major disaster or emergency. FEMA is committed to utilizing local firms in disaster areas to the maximum extent practicable as set forth in Federal Acquisition Regulation 26.204 and 42 U.S.C. 5150(b)(1).

Question 3. The people of Louisiana were hit by 18 months of unprecedented disasters. Severe flooding and subsequent wind damage caused by Hurricanes Laura, Marco, Delta, Zeta, and Ida caused nearly \$150 billion in damages to our State. Congress responded by providing \$5 billion in disaster relief aid through the Community Development Block Grant Disaster Relief (CDBG-DR) program administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs (HUD). It is my understanding that nearly \$3 billion of the \$5 billion allocated for disaster relief for Hurricanes Laura, Delta, and Ida is sitting untouched at HUD due to an expired data sharing agreement between HUD and FEMA. Specifically, FEMA has been unable to share damage assessments with HUD that would allow HUD to make determinations for funding deployment. Can FEMA work with HUD to quickly forge a data-sharing agreement between the two agencies?

Answer. FEMA and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) resumed full data-sharing capability following the approval of an improved, compliant Computer Matching Agreement (CMA) on March 14, 2022. The HUD-FEMA CMA cited 3 primary purposes for sharing data.

1. To transition HUD housing recipients whose HUD homes are uninhabitable due to a declared disaster or emergency with Individual Assistance authorized from emergency sheltering or FEMA housing assistance back into HUD-assisted housing. FEMA will quickly and efficiently match pre-disaster HUD housing program recipients with emergency sheltering or housing assistance recipients. Matching allows for early coordination between FEMA and HUD regarding HUD clients who are receiving emergency sheltering or FEMA housing assistance. The goal is to identify HUD housing program recipients participating in FEMA programs and return them to HUD housing assistance while also preventing duplication of individual benefits.

2. To develop the funding formulas to request additional appropriations from Congress and allocate funding for Community Development Block Grant Disaster Relief (CDBG-DR) grant awards. Data associated with this Agreement will be used by HUD to calculate the amount of HUD's CDBG-DR grants, which are based on the number of unmet needs for the disaster. HUD performs a complex grants formulation process using personally identifiable information data from FEMA and the Small Business Administration to generate its CDBG-DR grant allocations and figures estimating unmet disaster needs for the Office of Management and Budget and Congress.

- a. After calculating allocations for CDBG–DR grant awards, HUD will enter a data-sharing agreement with CDBG–DR grantees and provide a subset of the data used for making the allocation to the applicable CDBG–DR grantee so the CDBG–DR grantee can do planning and market the use of grant funds. These data are not used for determination of benefits.
3. To support duplication of benefits checks conducted by CDBG–DR grantees for CDBG–DR grant-funded programs, HUD will request data from FEMA on an as-needed basis to share with CDBG–DR grantees. HUD’s data request will be based on the specific program requirements specified in an approved CDBG–DR Grantee Action Plan, such as data for all survivors meeting specific criteria related to tenure, geographic area, and type of FEMA benefit receipt. The data will be provided to facilitate expedited program implementation while preventing the duplication of benefits already received from FEMA. All data sharing from HUD to CDBG–DR grantees will occur in accordance with agreements between HUD and the CDBG–DR grantees that address requirements related to the use and protection of the data. FEMA will support HUD by providing data analysis and FEMA assistance data to HUD.

As cited in purposes 2 and 3, Louisiana is now eligible to receive FEMA data per the data-sharing agreements established directly with HUD. In accordance with purpose 2, HUD requested data pursuant to the tenets of the approved CMA, and FEMA generated datasets in accordance with the needs of Louisiana and the data-sharing components of the HUD CMA. As a result of this process, HUD announced CDBG–DR allocations on March 22, 2022 for the remaining \$3 billion of the total \$5 billion appropriated in Pub. L. 117–43. In accordance with purpose 3, FEMA will provide the datasets to HUD who, in turn, will provide the datasets to Louisiana.

