

**DISASTER MITIGATION: REVIEWING THE EFFEC-
TIVENESS AND COSTS OF FEMA'S RESILIENCE
PROGRAMS**

(118-56)

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, AND
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON
TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

MAY 1, 2024

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Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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APRIL 26, 2024

SUMMARY OF SUBJECT MATTER

TO: Members, Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management
FROM: Staff, Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management
RE: Subcommittee Hearing on “*Disaster Mitigation: Reviewing the Effectiveness and Costs of FEMA’s Resilience Programs*”

I. PURPOSE

The Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure will meet on Wednesday, May 1, 2024, at 10:00 a.m. ET in 2167 of the Rayburn House Office Building to receive testimony at a hearing entitled, “*Disaster Mitigation: Reviewing the Effectiveness and Costs of FEMA’s Resilience Programs*.” The hearing will examine the costs and benefits of the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA’s) increasing emphasis on mitigation efforts. At the hearing, Members will receive testimony from the Senior Official Performing the Duties of Deputy Administrator for FEMA’s Office of Resilience.

II. BACKGROUND

FEMA’s MISSION

FEMA is the Federal Government’s lead agency for preparing for, mitigating against, responding to, and recovering from disasters and emergencies related to all hazards—whether natural or man-made.¹ FEMA’s primary authority in carrying out these functions stems from the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Stafford Act) (P.L. 100–707, as amended).² The Stafford Act authorizes three types of declarations: (1) major disaster declarations; (2) emergency declarations; and (3) fire management grant (FMAG) declarations.³ The Stafford Act authorizes the President to approve states’ requests for a Federal disaster declaration when “the situation is of such severity and magnitude that effective response is beyond the capabilities of the state and affected local governments.”⁴

¹ DHS, *FEMA*, (Feb. 3, 2023), available at <https://www.dhs.gov/employee-resources/federal-emergency-management-agency-fema>.

² Stafford Act, Pub. L. No. 100–707, 102 Stat. 4689.

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

III. HAZARD MITIGATION ASSISTANCE

FEMA provides hazard mitigation assistance through the Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) programs.⁵ HMA includes three grant programs: the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program, and the Flood Mitigation Assistance Grant Program (FMA).⁶ Under the HMA, FEMA also administers a loan program known as the Safeguarding Tomorrow Revolving Loan Fund Program (STRLF).⁷

In addition to the HMA programs, FEMA also provides hazard mitigation funding through its Public Assistance (PA) and Individual Assistance (IA) programs. Hazard mitigation funding for PA is intended to help communities rebuild public infrastructure in a way that accounts for future disasters.⁸ The same is true for IA when it comes to rebuilding residential households.⁹

HAZARD MITIGATION GRANT PROGRAM

Authorized by Section 404 of the Stafford Act, HMGP makes post-disaster mitigation funding available to state, local, tribal, and territorial governments that have experienced a presidentially declared disaster.¹⁰ HMGP is funded through the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) as a formula grant subject to a sliding scale based on a percentage of the estimated amount of disaster assistance up to 15 percent.¹¹ This funding can be used for a wide range of projects including to develop hazard mitigation plans, to elevate buildings in flood prone areas, and to retrofit structures for hazards including hurricanes or earthquakes.¹² HMGP also provides assistance to states, tribes, or territories that have experienced a fire which resulted in a Fire Management Assistance Grant (FMAG) declaration.¹³

According to the 2022 Hazard Mitigation Assistance Division Year in Review, in fiscal year (FY) 2022 FEMA awarded \$764.48 million for HMGP funding and \$19.97 million for post-fire assistance.¹⁴

BUILDING RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

In 2018, Congress passed the Disaster Recovery Reform Act (DRRA) (P.L. 115–254), which established a new pre-disaster mitigation program.¹⁵ In response to DRRA, FEMA created the BRIC program in FY 2020, which provides state, local, tribal, and territorial governments with funding to complete hazard mitigation projects.¹⁶ Prior to the establishment of BRIC, FEMA’s pre-disaster mitigation funding was available through the Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) Grant Program.¹⁷

Unlike the PDM Grant Program, which was funded through Congressional appropriations, BRIC is funded through a set aside of up to six percent of annual disaster spending from the DRF.¹⁸ BRIC also has three categories for awards (1) state/territorial allocation, (2) tribal set aside, and (3) a National competition.¹⁹ The National competition allows states to submit additional projects to FEMA that are separate

⁵ FEMA, *Hazard Mitigation Assistance Grants*, (Dec. 13, 2023), available at <https://www.fema.gov/grants/mitigation>.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ FEMA, *Public Assistance Hazard Mitigation*, (Jan. 4, 2024), available at <https://www.fema.gov/assistance/public/hazard-mitigation#:~:text=Public%20Assistance%20hazard%20mitigation%20provides,separate%20application%20or%20grant%20program>.

⁹ ELIZABETH M. WEBSTER, CONG. RSCH. SERV., R46014, *FEMA INDIVIDUAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS: AN OVERVIEW*, (Mar. 22, 2024), available at <https://www.crs.gov/Reports/R46014>.

¹⁰ DIANE P. HORN, CONG. RSCH. SERV., IN11187, *FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (FEMA) HAZARD MITIGATION ASSISTANCE*, (Dec. 28, 2023), available at <https://www.crs.gov/Reports/IN11187?source=search>.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² FEMA, *Hazard Mitigation Grant Program*, (Nov. 2, 2023), available at <https://www.fema.gov/grants/mitigation/hazard-mitigation>.

¹³ FEMA, *Hazard Mitigation Grant Program Post Fire*, (May 5, 2023), available at <https://www.fema.gov/grants/mitigation/post-fire>.

¹⁴ FEMA, *Hazard Mitigation Assistance Division Year in Review*, (June 8, 2023), available at <https://www.fema.gov/grants/mitigation/about/hazard-mitigation-assistance-division-year-review>.

¹⁵ Pub. L. No. 115–254, 132 Stat. 3438.

¹⁶ DIANE P. HORN, CONG. RSCH. SERV., IN11187, *FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (FEMA) HAZARD MITIGATION ASSISTANCE*, (Dec. 28, 2023), available at <https://www.crs.gov/Reports/IN11187?source=search>.

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ DIANE P. HORN, CONG. RSCH. SERV., R46989, *FEMA HAZARD MITIGATION: A FIRST STEP TOWARD CLIMATE ADAPTATION*, (Mar. 23, 2022), available at <https://www.crs.gov/Reports/R46989?source=search>.

¹⁹ *Id.*

from the state/territorial allocation.²⁰ As FEMA’s largest pre-disaster mitigation program, “[BRIC’s] guiding principles are supporting communities through capability and capacity building; encouraging and enabling innovation; promoting partnerships; enabling large infrastructure projects; maintaining flexibility; and providing consistency.”²¹

In addition to the six percent set-aside, Congress appropriated an additional \$1 billion for BRIC in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) (P.L. 117–58), with \$200 million annually for FY 2022 through FY 2026.²² On October 12, 2023, FEMA published its notice of funding opportunity which announced that \$1 billion in BRIC funding would be made available for FY 2023.²³

FLOOD MITIGATION ASSISTANCE GRANT PROGRAM

FMA is a competitive grant program that provides funding to state, local, tribal, and territorial governments for projects that reduce or eliminate the risk of repetitive flood damage to buildings insured by the NFIP.²⁴ IIJA appropriated a total of \$3.5 billion for FMA, with \$700 million for each of FY2022 to FY2026.²⁵

SAFEGUARDING TOMORROW REVOLVING LOAN FUND PROGRAM

In 2021, the STRLF program was established through the passage of the STORM Act.²⁶ This new program provides states, eligible Federally recognized tribes, territories, and the District of Columbia with funding to establish low-interest revolving loan funds for mitigation projects primarily to be used at the local level.²⁷ The IIJA appropriated a total of \$500 million for the STRLF program, with up to \$100 million for each of FY 2022 through FY 2026.²⁸

IV. FEMA’S STRATEGIC PLAN

FEMA’s mission is to help people before, during, and after disasters.²⁹ The 2022–2026 Strategic Plan lists three goals for the agency to better achieve their mission: (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.³⁰

GOAL 1: EQUITY

In its 2021 Executive Order 13985 on “Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government,” the Biden Administration defines equity as:

[T]he consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabil-

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ FEMA, *Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities*, (Feb. 20, 2024), available at <https://www.fema.gov/grants/mitigation/building-resilient-infrastructure-communities>.

²² DIANE P. HORN, CONG. RSCH. SERV., IN11187, FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (FEMA) HAZARD MITIGATION ASSISTANCE, (Dec. 28, 2023), available at <https://www.crs.gov/Reports/IN11187?source=search>.

²³ FEMA, *Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities*, (Feb. 20, 2024), available at <https://www.fema.gov/grants/mitigation/building-resilient-infrastructure-communities>.

²⁴ FEMA, *Flood Mitigation Assistance Grant Program*, (Apr. 8, 2024), available at <https://www.fema.gov/grants/mitigation/flood-mitigation-assistance>.

²⁵ DIANE P. HORN, CONG. RSCH. SERV., IN11187, FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (FEMA) HAZARD MITIGATION ASSISTANCE, (Dec. 28, 2023), available at <https://www.crs.gov/Reports/IN11187?source=search>.

²⁶ Pub. L. No. 116–284, 134 Stat. 4869.

²⁷ FEMA, *Safeguarding Tomorrow Revolving Loan Fund Program*, (Mar. 1, 2024), available at <https://www.fema.gov/grants/mitigation/storm-rlf>.

²⁸ DIANE P. HORN, CONG. RSCH. SERV., IN11187, FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (FEMA) HAZARD MITIGATION ASSISTANCE, (Dec. 28, 2023), available at <https://www.crs.gov/Reports/IN11187?source=search>.

²⁹ FEMA, 2022–2026 FEMA STRATEGIC PLAN: BUILDING THE FEMA OUR NATION NEEDS AND DESERVES 4–5 (2021), available at https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_2022-2026-strategic-plan.pdf. [hereinafter STRATEGIC PLAN].

³⁰ *Id.*

ities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.³¹

To achieve this goal, FEMA has committed to ensure its employees “increasingly reflect the diversity of the [N]ation.”³² The Agency plans to make their programs more accessible through a people first approach, to ensure FEMA resources can be accessed by underserved communities.³³ FEMA commits to periodically assess their programs and policies for inequities and redirect resources to eliminate any identified shortcomings.³⁴

GOAL 2: CLIMATE RESILIENCE

FEMA’s Strategic Plan asserts that the number and severity of disasters is increasing, and consequently some communities are barely able to recover before another disaster strikes.³⁵ In order to increase climate literacy among the emergency management community, FEMA plans to integrate climate science into “policy, programs, partnerships, field operation, and training.”³⁶ The Agency also plans to use mitigation grant programs to allow communities to mitigate against climate change.³⁷ Finally, FEMA plans to expand “the availability of, access to, and understanding of future conditions data and modeling”³⁸ to empower risk-informed decision making.

GOAL 3: FEMA READINESS

FEMA’s Strategic Plan asserts that an increasing number of disasters requires FEMA to have more staff readily deployable in advance of disasters.³⁹ To do this, FEMA will invest in professional development and improve employee retention.⁴⁰ Further, as evident with the COVID pandemic, FEMA needs to be ready to respond to non-traditional Stafford Act disaster categories. The Agency plans to increase their capacity to mitigate against critical National capability gaps for all disasters.⁴¹ FEMA also plans to unify coordination and delivery of Federal assistance by working with other Federal disaster partners to streamline the burdensome process.⁴²

V. THE PRESIDENT’S FISCAL YEAR 2025 BUDGET REQUEST

On March 11, 2024, President Biden released his FY 2025 Budget Request.⁴³ Included in the FY 2025 Budget Request is an \$85 million increase for FEMA’s climate resilience initiatives.⁴⁴ This includes:

FLOOD HAZARD MAPPING AND RISK ANALYSIS

- The President’s FY 2025 Budget Request includes \$363.75 million to support the Federal Flood Risk Management Standard and to meet FEMA’s remaining flood mapping requirements.⁴⁵
- This is an increase of \$82.3 million compared to the FY 2024 enacted funding levels.⁴⁶

BUILDING CODE STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

- The President’s FY 2025 Budget Request includes \$2.1 million to implement FEMA’s Building Code Strategy and increase building code adoption Nationwide.⁴⁷

³¹ Exec. Order No. 13985, 86 Fed. Reg. 7009 (Jun. 25, 2021), available at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-06-30/pdf/2021-14127.pdf>.

³² STRATEGIC PLAN, *supra* note 30 at 10.

³³ *Id.* at 11.

³⁴ *See id.* at 13.

³⁵ *Id.* at 14.

³⁶ *Id.* at 15.

³⁷ *Id.* at 16.

³⁸ *Id.* at 18.

³⁹ *Id.* at 21.

⁴⁰ *Id.* at 22.

⁴¹ *Id.* at 24.

⁴² *Id.* at 25.

⁴³ THE WHITE HOUSE, *FACT SHEET: The President’s Budget for Fiscal Year 2025*, (Mar. 11, 2024), available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/03/11/fact-sheet-the-presidents-budget-for-fiscal-year-2025/>.

⁴⁴ FEMA, FY 2025 CONGRESSIONAL JUSTIFICATION, available at https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2024-04/2024_0320_federal_emergency_management_agency.pdf.

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ Pub. L. No. 118–47.

⁴⁷ FEMA, FY 2025 CONGRESSIONAL JUSTIFICATION, available at https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2024-04/2024_0320_federal_emergency_management_agency.pdf.

CLIMATE ADAPTATION

- The President's FY2025 Budget Request includes *\$1.5 million* to focus on climate adaptation and create a full-time policy and coordination office within FEMA.⁴⁸

VI. CONCLUSION

In recent years, FEMA has placed an increasing emphasis on pre-disaster and post-disaster mitigation. The second goal of FEMA's 2022–2026 Strategic Plan is to promote leading the whole community in climate resilience. Furthermore, the President's FY 2025 Budget Request includes an increase of \$85 million in funding for climate resilience initiatives. This hearing will examine FEMA's existing mitigation work to better understand the costs and benefits of these programs.

VII. WITNESS

- Ms. Victoria Salinas, Senior Official Performing the Duties of Deputy Administrator, Office of Resilience, Federal Emergency Management Agency, United States Department of Homeland Security

⁴⁸ *Id.*

DISASTER MITIGATION: REVIEWING THE EFFECTIVENESS AND COSTS OF FEMA'S RESILIENCE PROGRAMS

WEDNESDAY, MAY 1, 2024

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC
BUILDINGS AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT,
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:01 a.m., in room 2167 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Scott Perry (Chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. PERRY. The Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management will come to order.

The Chair asks unanimous consent that the Chairman be authorized to declare a recess at any time during today's hearing. Without objection, so ordered.

The Chair also asks unanimous consent that Members not on the subcommittee be permitted to sit with the subcommittee at today's hearing and ask questions. Without objection, so ordered.

As a reminder, if Members wish to insert a document into the record, please also email it to DocumentsTI@mail.house.gov.

The Chair now recognizes himself for the purposes of an opening statement for 5 minutes.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. SCOTT PERRY OF PENNSYLVANIA, CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Mr. PERRY. I want to thank our witness, Ms. Victoria Salinas, the Senior Official Performing the Duties of Deputy Administrator for FEMA's Office of Resilience, for being here today.

Today's hearing will focus on examining the costs and benefits of FEMA's increasing emphasis on mitigation.

FEMA provides hazard mitigation funding to State, Tribal, and Territorial governments through several grant programs, including the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program; the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities, or BRIC, Program; and the Flood Mitigation Assistance Grant Program. FEMA also provides hazard mitigation funding through its Public Assistance and Individual Assistance Programs.

FEMA reported that in fiscal year 2023, it had obligated more than \$2.93 billion in funding for hazard mitigation grants. Going

further back in time, FEMA obligated more than \$1.78 billion in fiscal year 2022, more than \$2.34 billion in fiscal year 2021, more than \$1.31 billion in fiscal year 2020, and more than \$1.16 billion in fiscal year 2019.

I know the numbers kind of make people's eyes glaze over. But that means that over the past 5 fiscal years, FEMA has obligated more than \$9.5 billion for mitigation grant funding. That's a lot of money. That's not counting for all mitigation assistance spent in the years prior. And given this huge sum of money, obviously, we have several concerns.

First, despite literally spending billions of dollars on mitigation work, FEMA continues to ask Congress for more money. It is my understanding that FEMA is once again asking for supplemental funding for the Disaster Relief Fund, which is estimated to run out of money sometime this summer. And while FEMA claims that hazard mitigation funding will reduce the cost of disasters, FEMA continues to spend billions of dollars per disaster. So, we are looking for where is the cost benefit, how does the investment actually equal lower or less dollars being spent.

FEMA's 2023 National Preparedness Report stated that between January 2020 and December of 2022, there were 60 climate-related disasters, costing at least \$1 billion each. We fail to see how the \$9.5 billion in mitigation funding has significantly saved our taxpayers' dollars. I am not even sure "significantly" is the right word. But we are also concerned that the types of mitigation projects that FEMA is choosing to fund, we are concerned about them. And in reviewing some of the more recent mitigation projects approved by FEMA, terms like "nature-based solutions" and "climate resilience" appear in many of the project descriptions.

FEMA is funding projects to plant trees and improve habitat for wildlife. It is all very nice, but I am not sure it is part of the core mission and something we need to be spending tax dollars on, as none of this is within the scope of responsibility of FEMA's mission. And if that's where FEMA is funneling our taxpayer funds, is the Agency really achieving the stated goals of these mitigation grants, which is to reduce disaster costs and save lives?

Further, concerningly, FEMA has continued to struggle to make hazard mitigation funding available to the communities that need it the most. The application process to receive mitigation grants is complicated; so complex, in fact, it creates real challenges for small communities attempting to apply for these funds. And those who cannot afford to hire grant writers are the ones that are at a loss.

We see that wealthier States with the means to pay for outside consultants and grant writers successfully received FEMA funds, while smaller States are passed over. Are these funds truly being focused on reducing risk where it is most needed?

So, what I really want to know is how FEMA is awarding these funds. Is the Agency actually targeting investments to strategically counter the effect of natural disasters? Or is it simply funneling money to States that have the resources available to jump through the hurdles and complete the application process?

FEMA's BRIC Program is a prime illustration of those concerns. For the first 3 years of funding, 5 States, accounting for 30 percent of the Nation's population, received 50 percent, half, through the

BRIC, whereas 24 smaller States, accounting for 21 percent of the Nation’s population, combined were only awarded 5 percent of BRIC funding. That is a pretty stark contrast. In fact, according to analysis done by outside groups, the San Francisco and New York metro areas have been the most successful in applying for BRIC funding. Is there any accountability whatsoever for this? How can FEMA justify its allocation of funds?

We want to discuss these questions with our witness today, and we want to dig into how FEMA determines which projects have the merit to receive mitigation funding, and whether the process targets funding to projects that actually mitigate against disasters.

FEMA can’t solve everyone’s problems, and if FEMA is going to fund mitigation, at the very least, the projects should demonstrate they will actually reduce the cost of disasters. As a matter of fact, that’s the point of it.

With that, I look forward to hearing from our witness on these issues.

[Mr. Perry’s prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Hon. Scott Perry, a Representative in Congress from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and Chairman, Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management

I want to thank our witness, Ms. Victoria Salinas, the Senior Official Performing the Duties of Deputy Administrator for FEMA’s Office of Resilience, for being here today.

Today’s hearing will focus on examining the costs and benefits of FEMA’s increasing emphasis on mitigation.

FEMA provides hazard mitigation funding to state, tribal, and territorial governments through several grant programs including the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) Program, and the Flood Mitigation Assistance Grant Program (FMA). FEMA also provides hazard mitigation funding through its Public Assistance (PA) and Individual Assistance (IA) programs.

FEMA reported that in fiscal year 2023, it had obligated more than \$2.93 billion in funding for hazard mitigation grants. Going further back in time, FEMA obligated more than \$1.78 billion in fiscal year 2022, more than \$2.34 billion in fiscal year 2021, more than \$1.31 billion in fiscal year 2020, and more than \$1.16 billion in fiscal year 2019. That means that over the past five fiscal years, FEMA has obligated more than \$9.5 billion for mitigation grant funding. That’s not counting all the mitigation assistance spent in the years prior.

Given this huge sum of money, I have several concerns.

First, despite literally spending billions of dollars on mitigation work, FEMA continues to ask Congress for more money. It is my understanding that FEMA is once again asking for supplemental funding for the Disaster Relief Fund, which is estimated to run out of money sometime this summer. And while FEMA claims that hazard mitigation funding will reduce the costs of disasters, FEMA continues to spend billions of dollars per disaster. FEMA’s 2023 National Preparedness Report stated that between January 2020 and December 2022 there were 60 “climate-related” disasters, costing at least \$1 billion each. I fail to see how that \$9.5 billion in mitigation funding has significantly saved our taxpayer dollars.

I am also concerned with the types of mitigation projects that FEMA is choosing to fund. In reviewing some of the more recent mitigation projects approved by FEMA, terms like “nature-based solutions” and “climate resilience” appear in many of the project descriptions. FEMA is funding projects to plant trees and improve habitat for wildlife. None of this is within the scope or responsibility of FEMA’s mission. And if that’s where FEMA is funneling our taxpayer funds—is the agency really achieving the stated goals of these mitigation grants, which is to reduce disaster costs and save lives?

Further, concerningly FEMA has continued to struggle to make hazard mitigation funding available to the communities that may need it the most. The application

process to receive mitigation grants is complicated—so complex, in fact, it creates real challenges for small communities attempting to apply for these funds. We see wealthier states with the means to pay for outside consultants successfully receive FEMA funds while smaller states are passed over. Are these funds truly being focused on reducing risk where it is most needed? So, what I really want to know is how is FEMA awarding these funds? Is the agency actually targeting investments to strategically counter the effects of natural disasters, or is it simply funneling money to states that have the resources available to jump through the hurdles and complete the application process?

FEMA's BRIC Program is a prime illustration of these concerns. For the first three years of funding, five states, accounting for 30 percent of the nation's population, received half of the money through BRIC, whereas 24 smaller states, accounting for 21 percent of the nation's population, combined were only awarded five percent of BRIC funding. That's a stark contrast.

In fact, according to analysis done by outside groups, the San Francisco and New York metro areas have been the most successful in applying for BRIC funding. Where is the accountability? How can FEMA justify its allocation of funds? I want to discuss these questions with our witness today. I want to dig into how FEMA determines which projects have the merit to receive mitigation funding, and whether the process targets funding to projects that actually mitigate against disasters.

FEMA can't solve everyone's problems, and if FEMA is going to fund mitigation, at the very least the projects should demonstrate they will actually reduce the costs of disasters.

With that, I look forward to hearing from our witness on these issues.

Mr. PERRY. The Chair now recognizes the ranking member, Ms. Titus, for 5 minutes for an opening statement.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. DINA TITUS OF NEVADA,
RANKING MEMBER, SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
PUBLIC BUILDINGS, AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you, Ms. Salinas, for being here today to talk about FEMA's mitigation programs.

Climate change and related severe weather events have changed the disaster landscape, and they are devastating communities of all sizes, rural, urban, across the country. Responding to these disasters really isn't enough. Proactive mitigation strategies are necessary to build resilience before disasters, so communities have a chance to bounce back. Therefore, I am proud of this committee's bipartisan history of supporting mitigation efforts with demonstrable returns on investment.

In the past 5 years, FEMA's mitigation program, combination of programs, has grown substantially at Congress' direction to address these disaster impact trends and ensure public safety. In 2020, FEMA awarded the first round of BRIC grants, making unprecedented funding available to States before disasters to implement large and innovative programs. Last year, FEMA awarded the first capitalization grants for the Safeguarding Tomorrow Revolving Loan Fund Program, which was finally funded thanks to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Before these pre-disaster programs, FEMA's mitigation investments came almost entirely post-disaster through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program. This program remains critically important and still accounts for the largest percentage of FEMA's hazard mitigation spending, but the Safeguarding Tomorrow Fund and the BRIC Program are finally providing communities the proactive tools they need.

Since its authorization, FEMA has invested \$4.5 billion in pre-disaster mitigation through the BRIC Program, and State and local governments are demonstrating considerable demand, with the most recent funding opportunity being five times oversubscribed. Additional actions at the State and local level also indicate a growing interest in mitigation efforts to protect homes and infrastructure. States and cities from Mobile, Alabama, to Minneapolis, Minnesota, including Clark County, Nevada, where my district is, are establishing hazard mitigation offices, resiliency centers, and chief resilience officer positions to strategically identify local mitigation opportunities.

Now, talk about saving money, it's not surprising that investments in mitigation are proven to save money. Every \$1 invested in mitigation results in up to \$13 saved post-disaster.

We have also got to continue to prioritize the equitable distribution of these investments to disadvantaged communities that may be hit hardest by the disasters, take the longest to recover, and have the fewest resources to be able to do that.

I have heard from these communities that they are often unable to successfully apply for the Federal mitigation grant funding due to a lack of capacity and resources. And that is why I support President Biden's Justice40 Initiative to allocate 40 percent of BRIC and flood mitigation assistance grants to disadvantaged communities, and the Community Disaster Resilience Zone Act led by Representative Davids here in the House to identify census tracts that are most in need and most at risk to natural disasters.

Finally, access to mitigation funding can't stop at the local level. I believe homeowners should have the chance to access mitigation funds to protect their families and their financial security. Unfortunately, homeowners often can't retrofit their homes with recommended mitigation measures because they are just too expensive. Last year, I filed a successful amendment to H.R. 5473 that will create a pilot program for making individual homes more resilient to all hazards. It's my hope that it will be enacted before the end of the year so we will have an opportunity to measure its effectiveness.

Ms. Salinas, I thank you and your colleagues for your hard work to implement FEMA's growing suite of mitigation programs, and I look forward to more conversation about how this essential work not only saves taxpayer dollars but improves public safety.

Thank you, and I yield back.

[Ms. Titus' prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Hon. Dina Titus, a Representative in Congress from the State of Nevada, and Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank our witness for joining us today to discuss FEMA's mitigation programs.

Climate change and the related severe weather events have changed the disaster landscape and are devastating communities nationwide. Responding to these disasters is not enough—proactive mitigation strategies are necessary to build resilience before disasters, so communities have a chance to bounce back. Therefore, I'm proud of this Committee's bipartisan history of supporting mitigation efforts with demonstrable returns on investment.

In the past 5 years, FEMA's mitigation program suite has grown substantially at Congress' direction to address disaster impact trends and ensure public safety. In 2020, FEMA awarded the first round of BRIC grants making unprecedented funding available to states before disasters to implement large and innovative projects.

Last year, FEMA awarded the first capitalization grants for the Safeguarding Tomorrow Revolving Loan Fund Program, which was finally funded thanks to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Before these pre-disaster programs, FEMA's mitigation investments came almost entirely post-disaster through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program. This program remains critically important and still accounts for the largest percentage of FEMA's hazard mitigation spending, but the Safeguarding Tomorrow Revolving Loan Fund and BRIC program are finally providing communities the proactive tools they need.

Since its authorization, FEMA has invested \$4.5 billion in pre-disaster mitigation through the BRIC program, and state and local governments are demonstrating considerable demand, with the most recent funding opportunity being five times oversubscribed.

Additional actions at the state and local level also indicate a growing interest in mitigation efforts to protect homes and infrastructure. States and cities from Mobile, Alabama, to Minneapolis, Minnesota, and to Clark County, Nevada, are establishing hazard mitigation offices, Resiliency Centers, and Chief Resilience Officer positions to strategically identify local mitigation opportunities.

This is not surprising as investments in mitigation are proven to save money. Every one dollar invested in mitigation results in up to \$13 saved post-disaster.

We must also continue to prioritize the equitable distribution of these investments to disadvantaged communities that may be hit hardest by disasters and take the longest to recover. I've heard from these communities that they are often unable to successfully apply for federal mitigation grant funding due to a lack of capacity and resources. That's why I support President Biden's Justice 40 initiative to allocate 40 percent of BRIC and Flood Mitigation Assistance grants to disadvantaged communities and the Community Disaster Resilience Zone Act, led by Rep. Davids in the House, to identify census tracts that are most in need and most at-risk to natural disasters.

Finally, access to mitigation funding cannot stop at the local level. I believe homeowners should have the chance to access mitigation funds to protect their families and financial security. Unfortunately, homeowners often cannot retrofit their homes with recommended mitigation measures because they are too expensive. Last year, I filed a successful amendment to H.R. 5473 that will create a pilot program for making individual homes more resilient to all hazards, and it is my hope for it to be enacted before the end of the year, so we have an opportunity to measure its effectiveness.

Ms. Salinas, I thank you and your colleagues for your hard work to implement FEMA's growing suite of mitigation programs. I look forward to our conversation to learn more about this essential work that saves taxpayer dollars and improves public safety.

Mr. PERRY. The Chair thanks the gentlewoman.

The Chair now recognizes the ranking member of the full committee, Mr. Larsen, for 5 minutes for an opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. RICK LARSEN OF WASHINGTON, RANKING MEMBER, COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Thank you, subcommittee Chair Perry and subcommittee Ranking Member Titus, for calling today's hearing. I welcome the opportunity to discuss the impact and performance of FEMA's hazard mitigation programs, especially as one of the counties in my district is still recovering and rebuilding from November 21 floods.

Disasters cost taxpayers billions of dollars each year. Last year, climate and weather-related disasters caused over \$92.9 billion in impacts nationwide. This figure is not an anomaly. In the past 5 years, the average annual cost for disasters in the U.S. was \$119 billion.

FEMA can help States and disaster survivors cover some recovery costs, but many disasters go undeclared, which means homeowners, farmers, business owners, and State and local governments are paying the majority of disaster damage bills. This slows economic growth and recovery. It's unsustainable as well for those who live in the path of increasingly frequent and severe disasters.

So, hazard mitigation does offer a solution. And according to the National Institute of Building Sciences, every \$1 invested in hazard mitigation results in \$13 saved. FEMA projects that nationwide adoption of modern building codes also would save \$600 billion in disaster impacts by 2060.

In order to reduce the cost of future disasters, Congress and FEMA have dramatically expanded the mitigation grant programs the Agency offers. So, before 2018, almost all of the mitigation funding FEMA provided was only available to States after a disaster. The creation of BRIC and the Safeguarding Tomorrow Loan Fund have changed that. Since 2020, FEMA has been able to award over \$5 billion for mitigation projects before disaster strikes. This proactive approach is needed to protect communities, and I strongly support the additional investments that the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law made in these programs.

State and local demand for pre-disaster mitigation funding is very clear. FEMA's competitive Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program, the BRIC Program, is consistently oversubscribed more than four times over. That is why I support increasing the set-aside for the BRIC Program from 6 to 15 percent of annual Disaster Relief Fund spending. More money spent on resilience before disasters means less money spent on repairs after.

Now, making Federal funding available for mitigation projects is just one piece of a much larger puzzle. Money needs to get out the door to eligible States and local governments in a timely manner, and the funds need to be accessible to the most disadvantaged communities.

All new grant programs face some implementation challenges. The Pre-Disaster Mitigation Programs have not been an exception to that. According to information from FEMA, 77 award winners for the fiscal year 2020 BRIC funding cycle and 112 applicants for the fiscal year 2021 funding cycle have not yet received full funding. FEMA needs to make sure those funds get out the door promptly.

However, I am pleased with other efforts FEMA has made to improve the BRIC application process by simplifying the benefit-cost analysis requirements and offering technical assistance to disadvantaged communities. The positive impact of these changes is already noticeable as the Resilience Office has reported receiving a greater number of applications from new applicants.

So, I look forward to discussing solutions to continue improving program efficiency and getting mitigation funding out the door faster into the hands of communities.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is improving our Nation's resilience by providing \$5 billion to help communities proactively prepare for disasters, but there is still a long way to go.

I applaud the administration's prioritization of resilience to keep communities safe and to reduce disaster recovery costs. So, Ms. Sa-

linas, I look forward to discussing with you how we can work together to make FEMA's mitigation programs even more effective in the future.

Thank you for being here. I look forward to the testimony.

With that, I yield back.

[Mr. Larsen of Washington's prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Hon. Rick Larsen, a Representative in Congress from the State of Washington, and Ranking Member, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Thank you, Subcommittee Chairman Perry and Subcommittee Ranking Member Titus, for calling today's hearing.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss the impact and performance of FEMA's hazard mitigation programs, especially as one of the counties in my district is still recovering and rebuilding from the November 21 floods.

Disasters cost taxpayers billions of dollars each year. Last year, climate and weather-related disasters caused over \$92.9 billion in impacts nationwide. This figure is not an anomaly. In the past five years, the average annual cost of disasters in the United States was \$119 billion.

FEMA can help states and disaster survivors cover some recovery costs, but many disasters go undeclared, which means that homeowners, farmers, business owners, and state and local governments are paying the majority of disaster damage bills.

This slows economic growth and recovery, and is unsustainable for those who live in the path of increasingly frequent and severe disasters.

Hazard mitigation offers a solution.

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That is why I support increasing the set-aside for the BRIC program, from 6 to 15 percent of annual Disaster Relief Fund spending. More money spent on resilience before disasters means less money spent on repairs after.

Making federal funding available for mitigation projects is one piece of a much larger puzzle.

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The positive impact of these changes is already noticeable as the Resilience Office has reported receiving a greater number of applications from new applicants.

I look forward to discussing solutions to continue improving program efficiency and getting mitigation funding out the door faster and into the hands of communities.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is improving our nation's resilience by providing \$5 billion to help communities proactively prepare for disasters, but there is still a long way to go.

I applaud the Administration's prioritization of resilience to keep communities safe and reduce disaster recovery costs.

Ms. Salinas, I look forward to discussing how we can work together to make FEMA's mitigation programs even more effective in the future.

Thank you all for being here, I look forward to your testimony.

Mr. PERRY. The Chair thanks the gentleman.

The Chair would now like to welcome our witness and thank her for being here today.

Briefly, I would like to take a moment to explain our lighting system to our witness. There are three lights in front of you. Green means go, yellow means you are running out of time, and red means to conclude your remarks.

The Chair asks unanimous consent that the witness' full statement be included in the record. Without objection, so ordered.

The Chair also asks unanimous consent that the record of today's hearing remain open until such time as our witness has provided answers to any questions that may be submitted to her in writing. Without objection, so ordered.

The Chair also asks unanimous consent that the record remain open for 15 days for additional comments and information submitted by Members or the witness to be included in the record of today's hearing. Without objection, so ordered.

As your written testimony, ma'am, has been made part of the record, the subcommittee asks that you limit your oral remarks to 5 minutes.

With that, Ms. Salinas, you are recognized for 5 minutes for your testimony.

TESTIMONY OF VICTORIA SALINAS, SENIOR OFFICIAL PERFORMING THE DUTIES OF DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR, OFFICE OF RESILIENCE, FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Ms. SALINAS. Thank you so much, and good morning.

Chairman Perry, Ranking Member Larsen, Ranking Member Titus, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today about FEMA's evolving role in hazard mitigation. We value this subcommittee's legislative support and oversight of our Agency, and I really look forward to today's conversation.

Communities today face an increasing set of challenges, from atmospheric rivers to once-in-a-century fires. In 2023 alone, NOAA calculated that the U.S. sustained 28 disasters that each cost \$1 billion or more. That's the most ever in a single year on record.

At FEMA, our mission is helping people before, during, and after disasters. And our Agency is spearheading efforts to bolster communities' ability to understand and fulfill their role related to increasing disaster resilience. Improved resilience saves lives, results in less complex recoveries, and helps break the disaster cycle.

If we are going to help prepare our communities in the future, then we need to invest in the communities before a disaster strikes. One way FEMA is working to achieve this goal is through our suite of grant programs. Our Hazard Mitigation Assistance Program provides critical funding to invest in cost-effective activities that build a community's resilience while lowering future disaster costs. Despite historic funding levels across our programs, we continue to see more applications come in than funding is available each year. These programs are helping across our Nation.

For example, the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Program, BRIC, for the fiscal year 2022 grant cycle saw the largest BRIC notice of funding ever at \$2.3 billion. We selected 50 States, 35 Tribal nations, 4 Territories, and the District of Columbia to receive funding pending final review of their projects.

One example of these projects is from Jefferson Parish, Louisiana, where they are hardening power infrastructure to protect their community. This means that after a storm, not only will individuals and households be protected, but critical facilities, too.

State and local demand for project funding and technical assistance is only growing. Through the fiscal year 2023 BRIC application cycle, we saw a record number of requests for BRIC direct technical assistance come in, with 164 submissions and asks for support from all 10 FEMA regions. Through this program, FEMA provides tailored support to communities and Tribal nations that may not have resources to do the planning and project design on their own. FEMA has already announced for BRIC DTA 74 communities and Tribal nations for the program, and this year, we look to select another 80.

Up-to-date building codes are another efficient and cost-effective way to safeguard our communities. Therefore, we also established a new set-aside, a plus-up in our Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Program in the fiscal year 2023 grant cycle, and we saw \$52 million worth of building codes-related projects come in. That is a record breaking number for FEMA.

Our portfolio of hazard mitigation grants also includes the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, which provides funding to develop mitigation plans and retrofit in ways that reduce the impact of future disaster losses. We also provide capitalization grants for mitigation projects through the Safeguarding Tomorrow Revolving Loan Fund. This new revolving loan fund is helping States, Tribes, and Territories finance projects to reduce risk. These funds can be used as required local match, which means that they can be used for match for even FEMA programs, providing additional flexibility to communities. This reduces and helps eliminate barriers for many small rural and other communities with limited capacities that they may face.

Recently, FEMA and DHS also announced more than \$1.8 billion in funding for our eight fiscal year 2024 preparedness grant programs that help stakeholders prevent and respond to acts of terrorism as well as hazards.

Education and training are also key, and through our partnership with the National Domestic Preparedness Consortium, we offer over 190 trainings each year that are reaching thousands of emergency managers, first responders, and local leaders.

FEMA is also working to bolster resilience through the establishment of Community Disaster Resilience Zones and announced the first 483 zones last September. These designations will leverage collaboration and cross-sector coordination across all levels of Government, philanthropy, businesses, and academia.

As we look to the challenges ahead, we are currently implementing changes to accelerate the grant programs and build capacity. FEMA looks forward to our continued work with this subcommittee to mitigate hazards and build a more resilient Nation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to our conversation and your questions.

[Ms. Salinas' prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Victoria Salinas, Senior Official Performing the Duties of Deputy Administrator, Office of Resilience, Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Chairman Perry, Ranking Member Titus, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) evolving role in hazard mitigation. We value this Subcommittee's legislative support and oversight of our agency, and I look forward to our conversation today.

From atmospheric rivers to once-in-a-century fires, communities today face an increasingly complex set of challenges. In 2023 alone, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration calculated that the United States sustained 28 disasters that each cost \$1 billion or more—the most ever in a single year on record.

FEMA's mission is helping people before, during, and after disasters, and our agency is spearheading efforts to bolster communities' ability to understand, and fulfill, their roles related to increasing their own local disaster resilience. Improved resilience saves lives; results in less complex disaster recoveries; and helps break the cycle of disaster damage, rebuilding, and repeated damage. But, if we, as a Nation, are going to help prepare our communities for a future in which they continue to be tested by hazards, then we need to invest in these communities before a disaster strikes.

One important way FEMA is working to achieve this goal is through our suite of grant programs. Our hazard mitigation assistance programs provide critical funding to state, local, tribal, and territorial governments to invest in cost effective activities that build a community's resilience while lowering future disaster costs. Across our programs, we continue to see oversubscription, or more applications submitted than funding is available each year, as communities increasingly seek to use FEMA's grants to help mitigate risks, build operational capabilities, and save lives.

For example, through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, FEMA administers funding to develop hazard mitigation plans and retrofit in a way that reduces the impacts of future disaster losses in communities following a presidentially declared disaster. We also have \$185 million available for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 for the Rehabilitation of High Hazard Potential Dams program, which provides technical, planning, design, and construction assistance for eligible dams, and another \$26 million in FY 2024 through the National Dam Safety State Assistance Grant Program to provide assistance to states for strengthening their dam safety programs.

FEMA also provides capitalization grants for hazard mitigation projects through the Safeguarding Tomorrow Revolving Loan Fund program, which states, Tribes, and territories can use to finance projects to reduce their risks from natural hazards and disasters. These revolving loan funds can be used as the required local cost share for FEMA's other grant programs. Implementation of this program is helping eliminate barriers that small, rural, and other communities with limited capacity may face when seeking mitigation funding.

The Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program is one of FEMA's flagship grant programs and is designed to help communities increase their resilience to disasters and save lives. For the FY 2022 grant cycle, where FEMA announced the largest BRIC NOFO ever of \$2.3 billion, FEMA selected 50 states, 35 Tribal Nations, 4 territories, and the District of Columbia to receive BRIC funding, pending the outcome of the final review process. For example, an FY 2022 BRIC project in Jefferson Parish, Louisiana will help harden power infrastructure to pro-

tect residents, essential businesses, and emergency service providers from hurricane-force winds, as well as upgrade poles and wire to withstand 150-mph winds and lightning strikes. As a result, the project should decrease the risk of power outages to residents and critical facilities. Meanwhile, the FY23 grant application cycle, which made \$1 billion available in funding, received 1,233 BRIC subapplications across all 50 states, 35 Tribal Nations, 5 territories and the District of Columbia, requesting more than \$5.6 billion in project funding.

Recently, FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security announced more than \$1.8 billion in funding for eight FY 2024 preparedness grant programs, including \$373.5 million through the State Homeland Security Program and \$13.5 million to eligible Tribal Nations through the Tribal Homeland Security Grant Program. Our preparedness grants provide critical funding to help state, local, Tribal, and territorial officials prepare for, prevent, protect against, and respond to acts of terrorism and other hazards. For the State Homeland Security Program specifically, this funding can be used to support the acquisition of basic lifesaving skills that can be employed to assist others in a critical incident, including multi-casualty and terrorism-based events. Additionally, the Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Grant Program provides resources to close known capability gaps in housing and logistics and supply chain management; encourage innovative regional solutions to catastrophic incidents; and build on existing regional efforts.

As FEMA continues to administer this critical funding, the agency is also working to innovate and improve these and other programs to better increase all-hazards resilience across our Nation. We are currently implementing changes to accelerate the grant award process, the impact of capacity building, and other streamlined methods for our grant programs.

Through the FY 2023 BRIC application cycle, FEMA saw an increase in requests for BRIC Direct Technical Assistance (BRIC DTA), with 164 submissions—28 of which were from federally recognized Tribal Nations and 136 communities across all 10 FEMA regions. Through BRIC DTA, FEMA provides tailored support to communities and tribal nations that may not have the resources to begin resilience planning and project solution design on their own. FEMA has already announced a total of 74 communities and Tribal Nations selected from previous grant cycles, and the agency is expecting to make at least 80 more selections from these submissions. Recognizing that the development of up-to-date building codes is among the most efficient and cost-effective ways to safeguard our communities, FEMA also established a new set-aside funding opportunity—the Building Code Plus-Up—for the FY 2023 BRIC Grant cycle. We received \$52 million in applications, which is the largest amount of BRIC funding ever requested from FEMA for building codes. Aligning with the Administration's National Initiative to Advance Building Codes, the BRIC Building Code Plus-Up dedicates funding exclusively to all states, the District of Columbia, U.S. territories, and federally recognized Tribal Nations to support building code activities. Moreover, FEMA has established streamlined cost-effectiveness determination methods for some hazard mitigation projects and project types. Using one of these methods fulfills the cost-effectiveness requirement if the project meets applicable criteria.

FEMA is also working to bolster the resilience of our partners through the establishment of Community Disaster Resilience Zones (CDRZ). In September 2023, FEMA announced the first 483 CDRZ's in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. CDRZ designations will leverage collaboration and cross-sector coordination across all levels of government, philanthropic foundations, private non-profits, universities, the insurance industry, and other private businesses to assist our most at-risk communities in building resilience against natural hazards and extreme weather events.

Lastly, FEMA manages a network of training and education partners providing learning solutions to address preparedness gaps in communities across the country. The National Domestic Preparedness Consortium is our premier partnership that offers over 190 FEMA training courses to emergency managers, first responders, and local leaders.

As we look to the challenges ahead, FEMA looks forward to working with the Members of this Subcommittee to mitigate hazards and build a more resilient nation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to answering your questions.

Mr. PERRY. Well, thank you very much for your testimony. We are going to turn to questions now. The Chair is going to turn to himself.

I am curious. FEMA, says so right in the name, right, the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Emergency, right? So, I am looking at this publication: “FEMA Economic Benefit Values for Green Infrastructure.” “Benefit Values for Green Infrastructure,” under FEMA, July 2022. And I see in here, under green infrastructure benefit categories, one of the benefits is property value improvement, for, I guess—well, this is one of the—this is one of the things we are striving for. And I am wondering, are heat islands, is that an emergency? I guess this is mitigation, when you are talking about planting trees, right, urban trees here, I see. And we will get into the questioning about the value of that. But is that an emergency? And how much money are we spending on that?

Ms. SALINAS. We are, through our Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, and our portfolio of grants, helping communities reduce the risks that they face. And so, there are a number of eligible types of projects across our hazard mitigation grant portfolio.

As you well know, many of our grant programs have a cost-effectiveness requirement. So, from the very get-go, when communities apply, we are looking at the benefit cost of the programs and projects that are being requested as part of the vetting before any funding is given to projects.

Mr. PERRY. So, I get that. I guess, among other things, when I look at urban trees, I see the total benefit, if you talk about things including property value improvement, stormwater volume and quality, the benefit is \$1,055.19. And, of course, it is all broken down here. But I do wonder, and I think the people paying the taxes wonder, how you derive that benefit, number one. Well, maybe not number one. Number one is, how is this an emergency? Like an emergency is something—you think about a disaster. I mean, if you live at certain places, flooding is probably an issue that you can anticipate. Hurricanes might be an anticipated emergency, wildfires, you can go through the list of things.

Heat island. Well, let me ask you this. How is FEMA mitigating emergencies and disasters by planting trees?

Ms. SALINAS. FEMA’s mission is to help people before, during, and after disasters. And reducing disaster risk is one of the most critical ways that we help save lives, protect property, and ensure that communities can recover quickly after disasters.

The types of events that communities are facing is changing dramatically. We are seeing heat domes, we are seeing wildfires, we are seeing flood following fire, a whole range of types of disasters. And the approaches to reducing disaster risk are varied.

For instance, you have brought up trees and nature-based solutions. We are seeing that, in communities across the country, that there is a differential in heat depending on the topography. And so, there are many communities that are seeking to really cool down neighborhoods because each year, even this last year, there were several hundred deaths because of extreme heat. And so, that’s one of the emerging hazards.

Mr. PERRY. Do we know, ma’am, can you quantify how many deaths have been averted by planting these trees?

Ms. SALINAS. In the cost-benefit analysis—

Mr. PERRY [interrupting]. Do people stand out underneath the tree? What do they do? What’s happening?

Ms. SALINAS. With many of the solutions that really rely on nature, mother nature to protect and support communities, we have seen in different types of projects that the benefits are many. And as I mentioned—

Mr. PERRY [interrupting]. I get that, and I wish you could quantify some of them. My time is quickly running out. We have talked a lot and said nothing, I think, unfortunately. We want the results. Show me some results to any of this.

I see that also we are spending a boatload of money in Puerto Rico on sustainable energy, and I saw the list of people that were involved in putting the program together. But I didn't see anybody there to talk about the fact that the last two hurricanes had sustained winds of 180 and 175—max sustained winds, 180 and 175 miles per hour. I have a study here that shows the impact on solar panels begins at 56 miles per hour, and that's not to mention hail.

I will ask that this be entered into the record, this study.

[The information follows:]

Article entitled, "Severe Weather Can Have Long-Term Impact on Solar Generation: NREL," by Emma Penrod, Utility Dive, February 1, 2024, Submitted for the Record by Hon. Scott Perry

SEVERE WEATHER CAN HAVE LONG-TERM IMPACT ON SOLAR GENERATION: NREL

Events such as hail or high winds can have a lasting impact on solar panels' productivity, an NREL study found.

by Emma Penrod

Utility Dive, February 1, 2024

<https://www.utilitydive.com/news/severe-weather-hail-solar-generation-nrel/706254/>

DIVE BRIEF:

- Solar panels that have been subjected to severe weather events produce about 1% less energy per year after these events, according to a new study by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory.
- Although the immediate impact of a single event is relatively small, the effects could accumulate over time to represent more sizable losses for owners of large fleets of solar panels, according to Dirk Jordan, a distinguished researcher at NREL and an author of the study.
- Given the increased frequency of severe weather, solar manufacturers—and utilities—may want to consider more stringent standards for solar panel durability to avoid future losses, Jordan said.

DIVE INSIGHT:

Solar generation—and especially solar plus storage—is generally a good source of backup power in the aftermath of extreme weather events, Jordan said. But severe weather can have a long-term impact on the productivity of solar systems that increases with each severe weather event, according to new NREL research.

Each episode of severe weather decreases a solar installation's annual productivity by about 1% on average, according to the study, so a solar system that is subjected to multiple severe weather events could take heavy losses over time as a result. Previous research by NREL indicates that productivity of the average solar installation declines by about .75% per year, with solar panels in warm climates experiencing more rapid aging than those in cooler climates.

"It sounds small, and maybe it is if only one system is impacted," Jordan said, "but if you are an owner with a fleet of 5,000 systems and many megawatts that are impacted, it could represent a lot of money."

NREL's analysis also points to a possible need for more stringent testing of solar panels, Jordan said. For example, his team's analysis determined that hail begins to have long-term impacts on solar output when it exceeds about 1 inch in diameter.

The current industry standard calls for solar panels to be stress-tested for impact by hail of up to 1 inch. But given the increased frequency of severe hail across the country, Jordan said this standard may not adequately protect against lasting damage.

Jordan said he also had concerns about trends such as using larger modules with thinner front-side glass panels in utility-scale solar installations, as these modules may be more susceptible to weather-related damages.

The study also found that high wind events cause lasting damage to solar panels beginning at about 56 miles per hour, and that heavy snowfall may cause long-term damage beginning at depths of 1 meter, or a little over three feet.

These impacts aren't uniform across all impacted panels, Jordan said. Some panels, for example, might be sheltered from high winds by trees or buildings. Or poor installation or component quality could cause certain panels to be more susceptible to weather-related productivity losses.

The study didn't differentiate between residential and utility-scale solar installations, and wasn't able to explore the specific reasons why severe weather caused long-term productivity losses, said Kirsten Perry, a data scientist on NREL's PV reliability and performance team. She said NREL hopes to parse these issues and expand the dataset to include other kinds of natural disasters, such as heatwaves and wildfires, in future research.

Mr. PERRY. It just seems to me we are just blowing money that we don't have while FEMA asks for more.

And then finally, I look at the distribution of the BRIC funds State ranking. I have DC here with three disaster declarations, including inauguration, like that's an emergency we didn't see coming, apparently. Meanwhile, you have Mississippi with 21. DC is way up here, getting all this money. Mississippi is way down here, getting none of this money. That's an issue, ma'am, that needs to be resolved.

But I see my time has expired. So, I am going to yield my time and recognize the gentelady from Nevada, Ms. Titus, the ranking member.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Just a couple of things. When you're talking about measuring the results of mitigation, it's harder to measure something that doesn't happen than it is to measure something that does happen. And the purpose of mitigation is to keep things from happening. So, it's not just so easy to come with a statistic that the chairman apparently is looking for.

Also, representing Las Vegas, in the sunniest, hottest, driest State in the country, we have a great appreciation for heat islands and the damage that can be done to a community, to infrastructure, to individuals, to pets because of this extreme heat. So, planting trees does make a big difference in an area like that, and that can quickly lead to disaster. In some areas, it leads to fire, like I said, death, kind of devastation of a neighborhood. And so, we appreciate the emphasis on some of these heat islands that apparently the chairman doesn't have in Pennsylvania.

I did want to ask you, though—my glasses broke, so, I am sorry—the BRIC Program was five times oversubscribed. I mentioned that, and I think you may have mentioned it, too, and that many of the applicants were first time—the first time they had applied for one of these grants. I wonder if you could tell us kind of how that has evolved, if it's oversubscribed, what we can do. Do you need more funds? Would you just go into a little more detail about that program?

And having so many applicants seems to me to be one indicator that it must be successful because people want to be part of it.

Ms. SALINAS. Absolutely. Thank you for that question. And as you said, there has been a growing demand and realization across this Nation of the need to take action and reduce risk. Part of that has been the well-studied return on investment that hazard mitigation has, and our ongoing commitment to ensuring that all of the projects are cost effective. And we are seeing that many communities are becoming first-time applicants. And we have been working very closely with them to be able to better access our programs.

Some of those concrete things we are doing are dismantling the barriers to access Federal funding. So, for instance, over the last couple of years, not only have we streamlined language in our notices of funding, we have become much more proactive in how we provide support. So, you heard me mention direct technical assistance. The number of communities we are helping with that means that many of those are starting to now access competitive grants that they couldn't have accessed before.

We have also been providing and changing requirements around the support we give to low-income communities for conducting benefit-cost analysis, again, which is a requirement for all of our programs. It used to be an impediment, a barrier. People had to hire contractors in some cases. And because we recognize that low-income communities and rural areas, Tribal nations, and others could not necessarily do that, we have been providing more direct support. And we are seeing the results of that in the application numbers. The number of first-time applicants, the communities that feel like they can now move forward and take action on their risk is growing both for the hazard mitigation grant portfolio, but also our nonprofit security grant and our other preparedness programs.

And so, there is certainly a pent-up demand by communities across this Nation to be prepared, to be ready, to reduce risk, and prevent the preventable.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. In some of the smaller communities, you find that they don't have a technical grant writer. It's kind of like, well, you're not busy, how about filling out this grant for us? And now, in this very competitive world, that is just not going to cut it. They are not going to be able to get the resources that they may need or even know that they are out there. So, when you talk about technical assistance, does that help with hiring grant writers? Tell us a little bit more about those things.

Ms. SALINAS. Absolutely. Through the technical assistance we provide, there are a number of things that we are doing. And it is also many of our grant programs, like the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, have management costs that States can use for the non-Federal capacity they need to build. And so, there are certainly different avenues through our programs to build that capacity that is needed.

And the other thing that we are doing is making sure that—you mentioned, ma'am, the Community Disaster Resilience Zones legislation that had bipartisan support. It is also enabling us and other Federal agencies to really prioritize those places that are most at risk and most in need and provide even more proactive customer service and support to those communities to navigate both FEMA

funding and other funding that will help them address their resilience issues. And so, it is a multifaceted approach. These communities are facing complex, interwoven challenges. We saw it last summer in DC. We had extreme heat, but Canada's wildfire smoke. This is a new world that we are living in with really interrelated hazards and communities are wanting to tackle that holistically.

Ms. TITUS. They don't just stop at the border, do they, the problems? Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. PERRY. The Chair thanks the gentlelady. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Louisiana, Representative Graves.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you very much for being here today.

I am trying to understand how you prioritize. Louisiana submitted 113 BRIC project requests before they received the first one. And I want to make note, they received the first one in year 3.

I was actually very involved, working with then-Chairman Shuster and with DeFazio, in establishing BRIC. I couldn't be more supportive of mitigation and resiliency efforts when they make sense, which I think is what our chairman was getting to.

Louisiana is one of the most at-risk States in the Nation. I hear administration officials coming down to Louisiana and talking about sea rise and our risk all the time. It is very difficult for me to understand how it took 3 years and 113 project submissions before we get our first one. And then Washington, DC, is getting one of the highest allocations in the country.

This, I will tell you, wasn't the intent of the program. And I am just struggling with understanding how this possibly could be fair.

Ms. SALINAS. Thank you so much, sir, for that question. And I share your concern for the risks that Louisiana and other States and coastal communities are facing. And for your question around BRIC in particular, it is one of our competitive grant programs, right? As you know, Louisiana—we have a suite of grant programs, including the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, which a State administers directly.

And with BRIC, part of it is a State set-aside, so every single State gets a portion that they can use as they see fit for their priorities. The other portion has been competitive. And that is where we continue to iterate and improve how we look at that so that every State—and one will see it in the numbers last year—every State will get—

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA [interrupting]. I hear you. I hear you. But I guess it's really difficult for me to understand how to reconcile the two things, that we are the most impacted State and sea rise is going to destroy our State, and climate is going to ruin our future, yet we are getting no recognition.

And so, under FEMA's strategic plan, they list three goals. And I think that this is really the crux of why we are seeing these distorted allocations. FEMA talks about trying to address equity, climate resilience, and FEMA readiness. Can you tell me where in the Stafford Act those three things are?

Ms. SALINAS. Our strategic goals and our strategic plan are aimed at better helping us deliver on our mission—

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA [interrupting]. Hang on. I just want to make sure you understand the question.

Can you tell me where in the Stafford Act those three objectives are?

Ms. SALINAS. The Stafford Act requires FEMA to provide our support without any discrimination. And these goals help us achieve that—

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA [interrupting]. I appreciate your answer. It is not answering the question, though.

Are those three things in the Stafford Act?

Ms. SALINAS. The Stafford Act requires us to deliver our support without discrimination. And these goals are how we operationalize that.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. I am going to ask you to stop. So, you are not answering my question, and I think we both understand the answer is, no, these are not in the Stafford Act.

And so, what this does is it results in distorted outcomes. Look, this is what I did for a living and committed much of my life to resilience of communities. Louisiana has lost 2,000 square miles of our coast. It's like wiping the State of Rhode Island off the map.

If you come in and you use bad metrics that don't consider all of the risk, you are going to result in bad outcomes. You are going to miss opportunities.

Look, I will agree with you, climate is a risk, it is a threat. It is not the only one. And if we continue to sit there and myopically focus on it, we are going to miss opportunities to result in better outcomes, more resilient communities. And I think it's a very dangerous trajectory that FEMA is going down right now.

I want to ask you another question. How do you consider Risk Rating 2.0 and that methodology in how you prioritize grants under the BRIC Program?

Ms. SALINAS. The Risk Rating 2.0 has been the way that we now have actuarially sound pricing to make sure that—for our National Flood Insurance Program—

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA [interrupting]. I am familiar with what it is. How do you factor it in?

Ms. SALINAS. As I mentioned, we have a portfolio of programs, and those two are not interrelated. But what I would like to mention—

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA [interrupting]. So, I am running out of time. I apologize for cutting you off, but I just want to make sure. So, that is not, that methodology, that criteria is not used to prioritize mitigation grants?

Ms. SALINAS. The BRIC Program does not use Risk Rating 2.0.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. OK, thank you. I am just trying to understand that. I want to make sure I did.

So, lastly, does that mean that the mitigation investments you make are totally separate from the Risk Rating 2.0 methodology, to where if you make investments, it is very possible that flood insurance rates don't even go down, because there is a complete disconnect between the two?

Ms. SALINAS. Communities through our programs are addressing their most important disaster risks. And in Louisiana, for instance, the Flood Mitigation Assistance Program—

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA [interrupting]. I am sorry, I am out of time. Is that a yes or a no?

Ms. SALINAS. Our programs reduce disaster risk, and they reduce disaster flooding.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Will it lower rates? Will it lower rates?

Ms. SALINAS. When communities take action to reduce flood risk, it does have an impact through the community rating system on lowering the policy premiums.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. I yield back.

Mr. PERRY. The Chair thanks the gentleman. The Chair now recognizes the ranking member of the full committee.

Representative Larsen, 5 minutes.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

So, the Disaster Relief Fund is expected to run out sometime this August. Is that correct?

Ms. SALINAS. Yes, sir. Thank you for that question—

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON [interrupting]. So, if that happens, the Agency may be then forced to implement Immediate Needs Funding again this summer, if Congress does not pass the supplemental?

Ms. SALINAS. This administration submitted a \$9 billion supplemental request last year to address that estimated shortfall in the Disaster Relief Fund, and I fully support that request, as it will allow us to maintain the capacity needed for fiscal year 2024 levels and ensure we can fulfill our mission.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. So, what is the short-term impact to hazard mitigation projects from FEMA having to implement the Immediate Needs Funding?

Ms. SALINAS. For the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, like the Public Assistance Program, when we are in Immediate Needs Funding, the focus is life safety. And that means that obligations flow down to those communities that are in active recoveries and investing in their resilience, which has trickle—

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON [interrupting]. Can I put that in English, perhaps, for you? It's a lot of FEMA talk and bureaucracy talk. What it will mean is that some projects that were slated to get funding otherwise—

Ms. SALINAS [interrupting]. Will be delayed.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON [continuing]. Will not get funding.

Ms. SALINAS. They will be delayed.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Right, immediately will not get funding. They will be delayed until, presumably, until there is a supplemental.

Ms. SALINAS. Until there is a supplemental.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. So, we will be in a position where we were sometime last year? We went through this circus last year; is that right?

Ms. SALINAS. We were in a situation of Immediate Needs Funding last year as well, where payments had to be slowed because of the focus on life safety until there was a supplemental.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. And there is no way to get around that, from FEMA's perspective?

Ms. SALINAS. As the administration has requested, the approach for addressing the health of the Disaster Relief Fund is the \$9 billion supplemental request that was submitted last year.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Got it. So, moving a little bit, the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program recipients are allowed to use a percentage of the funding they receive to manage that grant. So, hearing from the emergency management folks in my State, and presumably others, it takes a while to receive that funding. So, they are essentially managing the grant on their own costs, as opposed to being able to pay for that management. And delays in determining the amount of that funding that will be provided may be causing a backlog of projects at FEMA. So, what is FEMA doing to work with our States to streamline that process, ensure State and locals can access those grant and management funds in a more timely manner?

Ms. SALINAS. I, like you, am eager to see these grants awarded and to see shovels in the ground. That is a priority for us all. And we are—

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON [interrupting]. It's usually backhoes, but yes. It's usually backhoes.

Ms. SALINAS. Backhoes. We are making progress, and we are expecting to see the pace of the awards continue to increase in the near future. And so, there are many things we are doing to get those grants out the door faster, from working with stakeholders more efficiently and transparently, promoting consistent decisions and awards, supporting our regions to facilitate that back and forth whenever information is needed, and to simplify our cost-effectiveness methods. And so, these are all things, given the extreme need, that we have been doing to really deliver the programs more effectively. And as I mentioned earlier, management costs are one of those things that States really rely on to be able to build the capacity they need to deliver on the projects funded.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Yes, it is pretty critical, because the States are the ones with their locals who are really doing the work here. So, if you can continue to focus on that, I would appreciate it.

Given the critical nature of mitigation projects in communities at risk for disasters, it is important that these grants for projects are provided. Have you looked at the average length of time from award to receiving the funding for BRIC grants and for Hazard Mitigation Grant Program grants?

Ms. SALINAS. Sorry, can you repeat the question?

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Have you had a look at the time, the average length of time, from award to receiving the grants for BRIC and for HMGP?

Ms. SALINAS. The timeline for the different grant programs varies. And our big focus is trying to expedite and tighten those timeframes from selection to review to award to implementation, because that is where we see the change in the world.

And for the BRIC Programs, many of the projects that have been submitted are transformational in nature, and so, they are larger scale projects and have more complexity to the review process before they can actually get built.

Other projects are sometimes very small. We mentioned the STORM Revolving Loan Fund earlier. That is able to fund a lot of smaller dollar, \$5 million and less projects really quickly because there is less complexity. So, we have many different project types

that are eligible across our programs, given the needs of communities vary. And the timeline oftentimes is very much woven in the type and complexity of the project a community is trying to undertake.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. That's fine. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. PERRY. The Chair thanks the gentleman from Washington.

The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Mississippi, Representative Ezell.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you, Ms. Salinas, for being here today discussing these very important matters.

I grew up in south Mississippi, on the Mississippi gulf coast, and unfortunately that is a hot spot for hurricanes. And I will say that I have policed every hurricane in south Mississippi since 1979. And during my time as a sheriff there, I helped many communities try to recover from some of these events. And when Katrina hit, I ended up with 4 feet of mud and water in my house, so, I understand.

The effect of FEMA's resiliency programs is critical for my district. I would like to start with the grant program that I think needs some improvement, the BRIC funding. Many studies have shown that States on the gulf and in the Midwest have struggled to receive some of the competitive portions of the grant. "Struggled" may be a nice word, because as we heard earlier, and I was going to bring this up anyway, Mississippi has received no money from the program whatsoever. I think most would agree that Mississippi is a hot spot for natural disasters.

What steps is your Agency taking to ensure these funds are distributed more evenly?

Ms. SALINAS. Sir, thank you so much for your question. And I know firsthand so many of the challenges Mississippi has been facing. I was in Rolling Fork a couple years ago before the tornadoes, focused on Mississippi River challenges with flooding.

We have many different programs that are being used to reduce disaster risk. And there is progress being made in helping States and communities utilize them. Not only for BRIC, as you asked about, have we seen every State now be able to benefit in recent years and have projects selected. Through our Swift Current Program, which is part of the Flood Mitigation Assistance Program, we saw Mississippi in particular—it had been since 2009 that Mississippi had not benefited from the Flood Mitigation Assistance Program. But with Swift Current, and the incredible partnership between the State of Mississippi and our region 6 and headquarters colleagues, they were able to access the new Swift Current to address flood risk issues in the State.

And so, the point here is that there are many tools. BRIC is one. It is competitive. There are the State set-asides. It has a Tribal set-aside. But the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, the flood mitigation assistance, dam safety, there are so many tools—STORM—that exist, that we are working to ensure that communities and States and Tribes are accessing to meet their unique needs.

Mr. EZELL. Do you believe the program is working as it was intended to in allocating these funds to areas that have been most affected by the disasters?

Ms. SALINAS. For the BRIC Program? Or which one in particular, sir? Sorry.

Mr. EZELL. The BRIC. Do you believe it has been working as it was intended to?

Ms. SALINAS. BRIC was conceived as an opportunity to do more risk reduction before disasters occur. And we are seeing so much risk across this Nation. And so, the criteria, the approach to the competitive portion of BRIC is certainly helping communities do those more transformational projects. And the State set-asides are helping States and Tribal nations for the Tribal set-aside do that work. We also doubled the Tribal set-aside over the last couple of years to enable Tribal nations to tackle their resilience issues as well.

Mr. EZELL. Many of the small, rural communities in my district have told me they lack the resources to apply for hazard mitigation grants. I understand FEMA recently hired a small State and rural advocate. But beyond that, what is the Agency doing to ensure rural communities have every opportunity to participate in these programs?

Ms. SALINAS. We, too, want to ensure that all communities, rural communities included, are able to build and invest in their resilience. And so, in addition to an advocate, our programs like the BRIC Direct Technical Assistance Program are helping many rural communities across this Nation, from the South, all the way to rural Alaska, to address their resilience needs.

In addition, FEMA is partnering very closely with the Rural Partners Network, the training and education I mentioned earlier. We have rural partners that deploy training for emergency management and risk reduction to communities themselves. And so, we have a comprehensive approach to emergency management and resilience building that is inclusive of the needs of rural communities. And like I said, we are trying to systematically dismantle those barriers that communities face, whether it's how to do a benefit-cost analysis, whether it's hazard mitigation planning, all those essential things. Our teams are building our capacity to enable the State and local governments and the communities they serve to invest in their resilience.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you for that. And just so you will know, we are still struggling to recover some of the funds from Katrina in 2005. And so, that just makes it even more difficult for our towns when they are having to fork out a lot of money. So, we need your help. So, let's get busy. Thank you.

Ms. SALINAS. Thank you so much, sir.

Mr. EZELL. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. PERRY. The Chair thanks the gentleman.

The Chair now recognizes the gentlelady from the District of Columbia, Representative Norton, for 5 minutes.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Salinas, climate change has fueled an alarming increase in the number and severity of natural disasters across the Nation. To better help communities prepare for the mitigation of the climate crisis, FEMA established the first Community Disaster Resilience Zones, including here in the District of Columbia, which I rep-

resent. How will these zones help the District of Columbia and other jurisdictions mitigate extreme weather events?

Ms. SALINAS. Thank you for that question, Representative.

We share a desire to see resilience built across this Nation. And there are so many needs that prioritization and working where there are the highest risk, highest need communities is exactly what the Community Disaster Resilience Zone Act called on FEMA to do, and what it is enabling us to do in partnership with many others.

So, our intention with implementing the Community Disaster Resilience Zones is to build resilience across this Nation in those most at-risk places. This new program, we established the first set of zones at the end of last year in every State and the District of Columbia, as you mentioned. And it is enabling us to do a couple of things.

Not only did the legislation call on a better cost share—that has come up as a big barrier for many underserved and rural communities. So, it is a 90-percent Federal share for those projects, similar for all of the CDR Zones. It also called on us to collaborate better with other Federal agencies. And so, we are seeing other agencies use these resilience zones as ways to prioritize technical assistance and grant funding, so that together we are driving and supporting resilience building in areas that it is most critical.

We are also partnering with other sectors. And so, it is a great opportunity and a forcing function and a force multiplier to see the private sector, philanthropy step in. And in the Southeast United States, we have already seen certain philanthropies begin working with local nonprofits and universities to really support communities both better understand the risks that they face, develop the plans needed to tackle it, and then mobilize the funding for multiple sectors to see those plans turn into concrete actions and benefits for people and communities. So, it has been an incredible opportunity that we give great gratitude for Congress for that, for the bipartisan CDRZs legislation, as it will certainly be a new tool and a way to make progress in this Nation.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you. The Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Program funds billions of dollars in pre-disaster mitigation projects at State and local levels. These projects will help our local communities better withstand extreme weather events.

How have BRIC grants helped my district—the District of Columbia—and other jurisdictions become more resilient?

Ms. SALINAS. The great opportunity that BRIC and our other Hazard Mitigation Grant Programs have afforded communities is an opportunity to really invest in what they see as critical. So, even here in the District of Columbia, last year, I had an opportunity to visit DC Water, providing many of us perhaps sustainability in drinking water in our own homes, where flood risk and natural disaster could create major challenges. And the District of Columbia wanted to make sure there was energy redundancy there. And so, BRIC helped contribute to that project.

And so, around the Nation, we are seeing communities being able to access these dollars to make sure their people are safe, that critical lifelines don't fail, and that we are preventing the preventable.

Because particularly when we are talking about natural hazards and disaster risk, there is much we can do to prevent the human suffering that disasters cause, and BRIC and our many other programs are part of that solution.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. PERRY. The Chair thanks the gentlelady.

The Chair now recognizes the gentlelady from Utah, Representative Maloy, for 5 minutes.

Ms. MALOY. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Salinas, thank you for being here. I have been sitting here listening. The nice thing about going last is that all the questions I intend to ask always get asked before I get to ask any questions. And so, I just want to follow up on some of the things that have already been said.

I was looking at the Stafford Act this morning, and it does say that one of the things FEMA is supposed to do, that Congress has told FEMA to do, is encourage States, individuals, and local governments to protect themselves. And then I am sitting here listening. And what I am hearing instead of that is flood insurance rates are prohibitively expensive and Congress isn't privy to the methodologies that are used to determine those rates. And success is being measured by how many grant applications are being submitted.

Of course local governments are applying for Federal dollars. They are always looking for more income streams. But I don't think that is a measure of how successful the Agency is being at meeting their mission and doing what Congress has authorized them to do. At-risk areas are not getting the grants they need, but Washington, DC, the seat of all bureaucracy, is getting grants.

This feels like it's just an example of what's wrong with bureaucracy. An Agency that exists to assist in disasters isn't assisting the areas that have the most disasters. State and local governments aren't getting the assistance they need to protect themselves, which is one of the things that the Agency is supposed to do. And rural areas, like a lot of my district, aren't qualifying for assistance. So, some of the people who are the least resilient and need the most help aren't qualifying for it. And then we keep talking about an increase in disasters, but the increase in disasters isn't resulting in an increase in the quality of assistance, it's just creating more bureaucracy.

And you have done a fairly heroic job here today of defending the Agency and talking about what you are doing. But I am not hearing answers that are satisfying to me as a Member of Congress. We have oversight over the Agency, and we have a responsibility to make sure that taxpayer dollars are being used appropriately. And all I am hearing is an Agency that keeps asking for more and more taxpayer dollars isn't giving satisfying answers about how they are being used. And it seems like it would be irresponsible for us to keep increasing funding for these programs that aren't doing what they were intended to do.

If my colleague, Mr. Graves, was still here, I would yield the rest of my time back to him so he could follow up on the line of questioning that he didn't get to finish. But I just want to say, the most fundamental question we should be asking in this kind of a hearing

is why should taxpayers, in a Nation that's drowning in debt, trust your Agency with more taxpayer dollars? And I haven't heard a good answer to that question during this hearing.

And if you want, I will give you a minute to try to answer that. But it's going to have to be a different answer than what I've already been hearing.

Ms. SALINAS. Thank you so much, Representative. And we, too, are committed to ensuring that taxpayer dollars are building resilience across this Nation. And so, what we are seeing is that the number of applications coming in far exceeds the dollars that we have to invest. And there are a number of ways that we are looking at ensuring the benefit and streamlining support, because that is also key for us as well.

And so, across our programs, we have been reducing barriers to applying. We have also been making sure that there is technical support to many different types of communities to access those dollars.

We also have been committed through lifting up great practices and supporting communities in designing projects, doing hazard mitigation planning, a whole suite of things that really makes it easier to access those dollars. And that is one of the fundamental steps, is reducing barriers.

The other is providing support in communities to help them with the planning, both through BRIC DTA, through other mechanisms, we do provide that direct support to communities to be able to better leverage our dollars.

Ms. MALOY. I would hope in this kind of hearing, we would hear a plan for how these disaster-prone areas are going to get higher priority for the grant programs that exist, and some actual concrete answers on what barriers are being broken down for underserved areas, including rural areas, and not just that you are doing it but some proof that it's working.

And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. PERRY. The Chair thanks the gentlelady.

The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from New York, Representative D'Esposito.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and good morning, Ms. Salinas.

So, I represent the southwest corner of Long Island. It's an area that was not only crushed in Hurricane Sandy, but just months prior to that, Tropical Storm Irene devastated it. I remember days following Hurricane Sandy, there were homeowners who still had the stickers on their appliances from replacing them from Irene that were now flooded out during Sandy.

So, during that time in 2012, I served as chief of the Island Park Fire Department. I was the incident commander during Hurricane Sandy. And obviously, I know how critical access to timely and sufficient funding was such a major challenge to emergency managers throughout Long Island.

So, I know that there has been a program put in place, the Safeguarding Tomorrow Revolving Loan Fund Program, which aims to remove some of the barriers that communities face when seeking mitigation funding. I know that it's a new program started in 2021. And understanding that, with any Government program, there is

often bureaucracy and redtape, especially when implementing a new program. And I was wondering if you can just briefly explain and tell me how the implementation of this program is going, and if you feel that it has been successful thus far.

Ms. SALINAS. Thank you so much sir, and great to see you again.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. Same here.

Ms. SALINAS. The STORM, our new revolving loan fund, is a great new tool in the portfolio of our Hazard Mitigation Assistance programs. And in the first round of STORM, we had multiple jurisdictions, States apply for these revolving loan dollars, requesting more dollars than we had actually put out in the first notice of funding.

And so, we certainly—we have been taking a test and learn approach, because we are really committed to ensuring we are streamlining, reducing barriers, making our programs easier to access. And so, there are certainly some lessons learned from this first round of funding that we are taking into the second round.

But we are seeing multiple States already begin to use the STORM dollars. And some of those benefits that we are particularly excited about is that the STORM dollars can be used as match for Federal funds, because that is one of the biggest barriers many communities face. It puts the cost-effectiveness requirements on the State so that that part is also easier for local governments and the States to manage on their own.

So, the nimbleness of this new revolving loan fund will be critical in addressing the many smaller dollar risk reduction projects that make a huge impact in communities. So, a lot of lessons learned coming, but it is one of those things where this next round will be responsive to those changes that we have seen and heard from stakeholders.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. And how have you done outreach to different communities? I mean, obviously, whether you are from Pennsylvania, from Utah, from New York, or anywhere else across this country, the resources that are needed, although the mission is the same when it comes to managing emergencies, very often, those resources vary. So, how are you making sure that you are connecting with emergency managers and municipalities from throughout this country, not just in the big places like New York City, but in the smaller communities so that they have available the resources that they need in order to keep their communities safe?

Ms. SALINAS. Thank you. Connecting with a broad range of stakeholders is key to mission success for us. And so, in the numbers and even who is applying and first-time applicants, we see success in that we are having many new entities apply for funding. And that is due to very robust outreach that has taken the form not just of traditional webinars and pushing out information, but also proactive approaches.

We have been talking about grant programs today. But even in our exercise and training programs that we offer to local governments free of cost, we have been proactively reaching out to say, you are a community that is perhaps in a Community Disaster Resilience Zone. Have you taken advantage of this? Can we help you use these programs more? And so, we are really changing our own approach to be more proactive and using risk information, using

Community Disaster Resilience Zones designations, and listening to where there is that need so that we are proactively supporting communities to access the resources they need. And so, it has been great to see the changes in applications come in, as evidence of that outreach.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. And I only have a few seconds, but I just want to leave you with one last thing. Obviously, during the Biden administration, we have seen an obscene amount of wasteful spending in this administration that's going to cost our children and grandchildren for decades. I would just ask that you please make sure that we keep an eye on duplication of funds and wastefulness in this program. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. PERRY. Thank you. The gentleman yields back.

Are there further questions from any members of the subcommittee who have not yet been recognized?

[No response.]

Mr. PERRY. Seeing none, that concludes our hearing for today.

Administrator, we thank you for your testimony, your timeliness, and your willingness to be here.

At that, this subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:05 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

SUBMISSIONS FOR THE RECORD

Letter of May 1, 2024, to Hon. Scott Perry, Chairman, and Hon. Dina Titus, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management, from AEC Science & Technology, LLC et al., Submitted for the Record by Hon. Rick Larsen

MAY 1, 2024.

The Honorable SCOTT PERRY,
Chairman,
Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515.

The Honorable DINA TITUS,
Ranking Member,
Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515.

DEAR CHAIRMAN PERRY AND RANKING MEMBER TITUS:

As the Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management considers the value of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) mitigation expenditures, we write to call your attention to the well-documented return on investment that the adoption and effective implementation of resilient building codes provides as well as the longstanding bipartisan support that enabled and encouraged FEMA to focus on these activities. The Subcommittee's May 1st hearing is particularly timely as it marks the beginning of Building Safety Month, an international public awareness effort to highlight the importance of building safety professionals in ensuring the resilience and safety of our built environment.

Numerous studies confirm that the adoption and implementation of current model building codes is one of the best mitigation strategies for lessening the impacts of natural hazards, including hurricanes and flooding.^{1 2 3 4 5} The National Institute of Building Sciences (NIBS)—a Congressionally chartered building science organization—estimates that building to modern building codes saves \$11 dollars for every \$1 dollar invested through earthquake, flood, and wind mitigation benefits, while retrofitting 2.5 million homes in the wildland urban interface to wildfire codes could provide a nationwide benefit-cost ratio as high as \$8 dollars for every \$1 dollar invested.⁶ FEMA projects that if all future construction adhered to current model codes, the nation would avoid more than \$600 billion dollars in cumulative losses from floods, hurricanes, and earthquakes by 2060.⁷ Three U.S. Department of Energy National Laboratories recently found that during prolonged weather-induced power outages, coupled with extreme heat or cold, current codes can reduce deaths due to extreme heat by 80% and extreme cold by 30%.⁸

¹Porter, K. *Do Disaster-Resistant Buildings Deliver Climate Benefits?* SPA Risk LLC (2021).

²FEMA, *Building Codes Save: A Nationwide Study* (Nov. 2020).

³Corelogic, *Can Modern Building Codes Impact Mortgage Delinquency After Hurricanes?* (Aug. 2023).

⁴Kousky, C., M. Palim, and Y. Pan. *Flood Damage and Mortgage Credit Risk: A Case Study of Hurricane Harvey*, *Journal of Housing Research* v. 29 (Nov. 2020).

⁵Corelogic, *What Are the Effects of Natural Hazards on Mortgage Delinquencies?* (Nov. 2021).

⁶NIBS, *Natural Hazard Mitigation Saves: 2018 Interim Report* (2019).

⁷FEMA, *Protecting Communities and Saving Money: The Case for Adopting Building Codes* (Nov. 2020).

⁸DOE, *Enhancing Resilience in Buildings Through Energy Efficiency* (July 2023).

In addition, contemporary research continues to find that modern model building codes have no appreciable implications for housing affordability^{9 10 11}—in fact, no peer-reviewed research has found otherwise. One study considering the role of government regulation on home prices found that construction costs—including labor and materials—were flat from 1980 to 2013, a period during which construction codes were widely adopted and updated.¹²

In recognition of their well-documented benefits, FEMA has incentivized and encouraged the use of resilient codes at all levels of government to “increase the resilience of communities after a disaster,” “protect lives and property,” and to “reduce[] the need for future Federal disaster recovery funding and other assistance.”¹³ This approach transcends partisanship; it was significantly advanced during the Trump Administration through FEMA¹⁴ as well as within the Federal government’s National Mitigation Investment Strategy—developed by the Mitigation Framework Leadership Group (MitFLG)¹⁵—and continues today.

FEMA’s efforts have similarly, and consistently, received bipartisan support from Congress. The most comprehensive update to FEMA’s natural hazards response and recovery authorities, the Robert T. Stafford Act Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (P.L. 93–288, as amended), in the last decade was drafted and advanced by Republican leadership in the U.S. House and Senate. That legislation, the Disaster Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2018 (Div. D of P.L. 115–254), for the first time authorized FEMA to provide grants pre-disaster to assist communities in adopting, updating, and enforcing resilient building codes.¹⁶ Congress’ doing so sensibly expanded FEMA’s preexisting post-disaster support for these same activities, which FEMA has supported since the 1990s. These activities principally support the evaluation and mitigation of existing risk to the built environment through experts, community engagement, and training. Recognizing that some jurisdictions have adopted stronger codes than those adopted at the state level, FEMA’s Fiscal Year 2023 Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant program incentivizes both state and local adoption and implementation of hazard-resistant codes in making mitigation project awards.

We welcome the Subcommittee’s review of FEMA’s mitigation leadership and encourage continued bipartisan support for the development, adoption, and effective implementation of resilient building codes and standards.

Sincerely,

AEC SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY, LLC.
AMERICAN CONCRETE INSTITUTE.
AMERICAN PROPERTY CASUALTY
INSURANCE ASSOCIATION.
AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CIVIL ENGINEERS.
AMERICAN SOCIETY OF INTERIOR
DESIGNERS.
APPLIED TECHNOLOGY COUNCIL.
ASHRAE.

ASSOCIATION OF STATE FLOODPLAIN
MANAGERS.
BUILDSTRONG AMERICA.
CONCRETE FOUNDATIONS ASSOCIATION.
CONCRETE REINFORCING STEEL
INSTITUTE.
CONGRESSIONAL FIRE SERVICES
INSTITUTE.

⁹Simmons, K. & Kovacs, P., *Real Estate Market Response to Enhanced Building Codes in Moore, OK*, Investigative Journal of Risk Reduction (Mar. 2018) (stronger building code had no effect on the price per square foot or home sales).

¹⁰NEHRP Consultants Joint Venture, *Cost Analyses and Benefit Studies for Earthquake-Resistant Construction in Memphis, Tennessee*, NIST GCR 14–917–26 (2013) (adopting stronger codes would add less than 1-percent to the construction while reducing annualized loss—in terms of repair cost, collapse probability, and fatalities—by approximately 50-percent).

¹¹Porter, K., *Resilience-related building-code changes don’t affect affordability*, SPA Risk LLC Working Paper Series 2019–01 (2019) (over the nearly 30-year period studied only increased a home’s purchase price by around a half a percentage point in earthquake country or in an area affected by riverine flood).

¹²Gyourko, J. & Molloy, R., *Regulation and Housing Supply*, Handbook of Regional and Urban Economics, Volume 5B Chapter 19 (2015).

¹³FEMA, *Consensus-Based Codes, Specifications and Standards for Public Assistance*, FEMA Recovery Interim Policy FP–104–009–11 Version 2.1 (Dec. 2019)

¹⁴*Id.*

¹⁵U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Mitigation Framework Leadership Group (MitFLG), *National Mitigation Investment Strategy* (Aug. 2019).

¹⁶*Compare* H.R. 4460 (committee-passed), 115th Cong. (2018) (authoring grants “to establish and carry out enforcement activities to implement the latest published editions of relevant consensus-based codes, specifications, and standards that incorporate the latest hazard-resistant designs”), *with* H.R. 302 (enacted), 115th Cong. (2018) (“to establish and carry out enforcement activities and implement the latest published editions of relevant consensus-based codes, specifications, and standards that incorporate the latest hazard-resistant designs”) (clarifying that grants can support both the adoption and enforcement of resilient codes).

EARTHQUAKE ENGINEERING RESEARCH
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 HOME SAFETY.
 INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE
 CHIEFS.
 INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE
 FIGHTERS.
 INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
 STRUCTURAL MOVERS.
 INTERNATIONAL CODE COUNCIL.
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 INSURANCE COMPANIES.
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 ENERGY OFFICIALS.
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 ASSOCIATION.
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 ASSOCIATION.
 NATIONAL READY MIXED CONCRETE
 ASSOCIATION.
 NATIONAL ELECTRICAL MANUFACTURERS
 ASSOCIATION.
 NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL.
 NORTH AMERICAN INSULATION
 MANUFACTURERS ASSOCIATION.
 POLYISOCYANURATE INSULATION
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 CONTRACTORS NATIONAL ASSOCIATION.
 SINGLE PLY ROOFING INDUSTRY.
 SOCIETY OF FIRE PROTECTION
 ENGINEERS.
 STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS ASSOCIATION OF
 CALIFORNIA.
 TILT-UP CONCRETE ASSOCIATION.
 U.S. GREEN BUILDING COUNCIL.
 U.S. RESILIENCY COUNCIL.
 UNION OF CONCERNED SCIENTISTS.

**International Code Council’s 2024 Building Safety Month Proclamations
Prepared for the Subcommittee, Submitted for the Record by Hon. Rick
Larsen**

2024 BUILDING SAFETY MONTH PROCLAMATIONS PROVIDED BY THE
INTERNATIONAL CODE COUNCIL

Prepared for submission to the T&I Subcommittee on Economic Development,
Public Buildings, and Emergency Management, hearing entitled, “Disaster Mitigation:
Reviewing the Effectiveness and Costs of FEMA’s Resilience Programs.”

MAY 1, 2024

Member	Statewide	Org/AHJ
Grace F. Napolitano (CA) District	ICC LA BASIN CHAPTER	https://www.iccsafe.org/wp-content/uploads/proclamations/2024/generated/ICC_LA_BASIN_CHAPTER-California.pdf
John Garamendi (CA) District	Central Coast ICC Chapter of Code Officials	https://www.iccsafe.org/wp-content/uploads/proclamations/2024/generated/Central_Coast_ICC_Chapter_of_Code_Officials-California.pdf
Jared Huffman (CA) District	Redwood Empire Association of Code Officials	https://www.iccsafe.org/wp-content/uploads/proclamations/2024/generated/Redwood_Empire_Association_of_Code_Officials-California.pdf
Eleanor Holmes Norton (DC) Statewide	D.C. Code Officials Association	https://www.iccsafe.org/wp-content/uploads/proclamations/2024/generated/D_C_Code_Officials_Association_DCCOA-District%20of%20Columbia.pdf
Sharice Davids (KS) District	City of Lenexa	https://www.iccsafe.org/wp-content/uploads/proclamations/2024/uploaded/2024-Proclamation-Lenexa-Kansas.pdf
Sam Graves (MO) (ex officio) Statewide	Missouri Association of Building Officials & Inspectors	https://www.iccsafe.org/wp-content/uploads/proclamations/2024/uploaded/Chapter-Proclamation-ICC.pdf
Dina Titus (NV), Ranking Member Both	Nevada Organization of Building Officials Southern Nevada Building Officials	https://www.iccsafe.org/wp-content/uploads/proclamations/2024/generated/Nevada_Organization_of_Building_Officials-Nevada.pdf https://www.iccsafe.org/wp-content/uploads/proclamations/2024/generated/Southern_Nevada_Building_Officials-Nevada.pdf
Anthony D’Esposito (NY) Both	New York State Building Officials Conference Building Inspectors Association of Nassau County	https://www.iccsafe.org/wp-content/uploads/Xerox-Scan-20240307-101524.pdf https://www.iccsafe.org/wp-content/uploads/BIANCO.BSM_.pdf
Lori Chavez-DeRemer (OR), Vice Chair ... Statewide	Oregon Permit Technicians Association	https://www.iccsafe.org/wp-content/uploads/proclamations/2024/generated/Oregon_Permit_Technicians_Association-Oregon.pdf
Celeste Maloy (UT) District	City of Millcreek	https://www.iccsafe.org/wp-content/uploads/proclamations/2024/uploaded/Building-Safety-Month-Proclamation-2024-MillcreekUT.pdf
Rick Larsen (WA) (ex officio) Statewide	Washington State Association of Permit Technicians	https://www.iccsafe.org/wp-content/uploads/proclamations/2024/generated/Washington_State_Association_of_Permit_Technicians-Washington.pdf
Derrick Van Orden (WI) Statewide	State of Wisconsin—Governatorial Proclamation Wisconsin Code Officials Alliance	https://evers.wi.gov/Documents/050124_Proclamation_Building%20Safety%20Month.pdf https://www.iccsafe.org/wp-content/uploads/proclamations/2024/uploaded/2024-ICC-BSM-Proc-WCOA.pdf
Garret Graves (LA) Statewide	Building Officials Association of Louisiana	https://www.iccsafe.org/wp-content/uploads/BOAL-2024-BSM-Proclamation-Louisiana.pdf
Troy A. Carter (LA) Statewide	Building Officials Association of Louisiana	https://www.iccsafe.org/wp-content/uploads/BOAL-2024-BSM-Proclamation-Louisiana.pdf
Scott Perry (PA), Chairman District	City of York	Proclamation wasn’t available at https://www.iccsafe.org/advocacy/building-safety-month/2024-proclamations/

[Editor’s note: The proclamations are retained in committee files and are available online via the links provided in the table above.]

APPENDIX

QUESTIONS TO VICTORIA SALINAS, SENIOR OFFICIAL PERFORMING THE DUTIES OF DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR, OFFICE OF RESILIENCE, FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY, FROM HON. SCOTT PERRY

Question 1. Over the past five fiscal years, FEMA has obligated more than \$9.5 billion in mitigation funding, which includes funding through Public Assistance, the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program, the Hazard Mitigation Grant (HMGP) program, and the Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) Grant program.

Question 1.a. In your estimation, what percentage of that money has been drawn down?

ANSWER. For the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program, the Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA), and Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), and their legacy programs, we estimate roughly 27 percent of a \$6.4B total funds obligated has been drawn down in the last five years as of May 2024. FEMA is unable to report Public Assistance (PA) Mitigation funds drawn down as an isolated figure from other PA grants.

Question 1.b. Once a mitigation project has been approved by FEMA, what is the average amount of time it takes for a project to be completed?

ANSWER. The average timeline for project completion and closeout for BRIC, FMA, and HMGP programs from the date of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) approval varies widely depending on the project type, ranging from, for example, 35 months for Generator projects, to 52 months for Saferooms and Wind Shelters. A common issue we most see which can impact project timelines is:

- Capacity of our applicants—HMA project applicants often need to spend time and effort pulling together the resources they need—whether in administrative, planning, or personnel costs, to adequately prepare and execute a project plan.

Question 1.c. How much of that time is spent waiting for an Environmental and Historic Preservation review?

ANSWER. Since the Environmental and Historic Preservation (EHP) review is completed prior to the award/obligation, there is no additional time associated with the EHP review post award.

Question 2. In Fiscal Year 2020, the first year that BRIC funding was available, FEMA received 991 subapplications for funding. Of those subapplications, 406 were selected for further review.

Question 2.a. How many of those subapplications were eventually funded?

ANSWER. As of April 30, 2024, 86 percent (351) of Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 BRIC subapplications received an initial obligation. Of the remaining subapplications, 6.9 percent (28) were pending an initial obligation, and 7.1 percent (29) had been withdrawn by the Applicant. FEMA and BRIC Applicants are making progress towards implementing the vast majority of subapplications and are in line with historic obligation trends for FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) grants. However, there are still 28 FY 2020 BRIC subapplications that have yet to receive an initial obligation. Often these delays are seen in infrastructure projects that have multi-year implementation timelines, complex EHP compliance pre-award work, and/or permitting processes to complete prior to implementation.

FEMA is focused on working with Applicants to complete pre-award work so that awards can be made and work started. In support of this, FEMA is putting more resources into Regional Offices to work through prioritized subapplications and move them closer to award.

Question 2.b. To date, how many of those projects have been completed?

ANSWER. BRIC seeks to fund transformational projects that are generally multi-year in nature and provide communities the opportunity to transform their risk profile and make investments to increase their resilience in the face of increasing hazards and climate change. Often times, these types of projects require significant time to complete feasibility reviews, clear the EHP review process, and position the project for award, construction, and ultimately project closeout.

Although, FEMA has not completed closeout for any FY 2020 BRIC grants, which is the final step of project completion, it is estimated that approximately 25 percent of subgrants are nearly complete. For context, the FY 2020 BRIC application period closed on January 29, 2021, and selections were announced on July 1, 2021. Each grant had a period of performance of at least three years, with FEMA having the ability to provide extensions.

Question 2.c. When do you estimate that the remaining Fiscal Year 2020 BRIC projects will be completed?

ANSWER. For the remaining FY 2020 BRIC projects, we can only estimate the remaining time to complete these projects based on historic averages. Historically, FEMA HMA projects take on average 48 months from the date of project approval to grant closeout. This includes the standard 36 months allowed for project completion, with a 12 month extension. This figure varies widely depending on project type. Numerous factors such as scope, complexity, geographic location, and timeframe have impacts on the completion of an individual project.

For example, capability and capacity building projects may be completed more quickly than infrastructure projects.

FEMA and Applicants work together throughout the pre-award stage to move projects forward and get construction started. This requires strong coordination between FEMA and Applicants, as well as between Applicants and Subapplicants to ensure the project satisfies all requirements and can be awarded and then move through the construction phase in a timely manner.

FEMA is working with Applicants to complete Requests for Information (RFI) and other pre-award activities to obligate funds as quickly as possible. To help expedite this part of the process, additional resources are being provided to FEMA regions to target prioritized projects for obligation in pursuit of completing projects. FEMA also works closely with applicants through the EHP compliance review process. During this phase, projects are reviewed to determine the potential effects on the environment and historic properties to ensure all activities funded by FEMA comply with Federal EHP regulations, laws, and Executive Orders. The EHP review must be completed before funds are obligated. Infrastructure and other projects involving construction with the potential to impact natural or cultural resources will be on the longer end of the review timeline, while other funded subapplications for capability and capacity building activities are generally shorter in timeframes to obligate funds.

Question 3. FEMA has consistently highlighted that the BRIC program is over-subscribed. For example, in the Fiscal Year 2022 grant cycle, FEMA made \$2.3 billion in funding available, but received applications for more than \$4.6 billion in funding.

Does FEMA make all the potential BRIC funding available each year, or does FEMA hold back some funding each grant cycle? Please describe the rationale for FEMA's decision.

ANSWER. With the BRIC Program, FEMA has always worked to best balance funding communities' resilience goals with long-term stability of the program. Relative consistency on amount of dollars available year-after-year for the BRIC program allows for communities to make long-term investments in reducing not only their current risk, but also their future risks to natural disasters. The funding level made available each year accounts for both the need to continue to build momentum in addressing a portion of the unmet mitigation needs, with reserving funding from the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) set-aside to continue to make resilience investments for communities.

Section 203(i) of the Stafford Act (42 U.S.C. § 5133(i)) authorizes FEMA to fund BRIC activities under section 203 by setting aside from the DRF, with respect to each major disaster, an amount equal to 6 percent of the estimated aggregate amount of grants for major disaster assistance under the Stafford Act. This authority is discretionary and does not include a specific methodology to be used when calculating the estimated aggregate amount of disaster grant funding. FEMA implements this authority using a methodology determined to be appropriate by FEMA's Office of the Chief Financial Officer that manages the health of the DRF and addresses stakeholder feedback requesting consistency in funding levels year to year. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act or better known as the Bipartisan In-

infrastructure Law (BIL) appropriated an additional \$1 billion for BRIC, with \$200 million in each fiscal year from 2022 until 2026. FEMA has announced the additional \$200 million each fiscal year in addition to the BRIC funding set aside as a result of disaster activity.

Question 4. It is my understanding that FEMA mitigation funding has been going to projects that utilize terms like “nature based-solutions” or “climate resistant.” Furthermore, in the past FEMA funds have been used to plant trees to allegedly address “heat islands.”

When it comes to the benefit-cost analysis, how does FEMA determine the numbers assigned as pre-calculated benefits for mitigating against things like heat islands?

ANSWER. Pre-calculated benefits are a streamlined methodology where FEMA calculated pre-determined cost-effectiveness, eliminating the requirement for a separate benefit-cost analysis (BCA). Pre-calculated benefits are values that FEMA calculates based on research and statistical analysis or computer modeling of hazard mitigation projects.

Currently, FEMA does not have pre-calculated benefits for addressing heat islands. Heat mitigation projects must be cost-effective and applicants or FEMA complete a full benefit-cost analysis to ensure compliance.

QUESTIONS TO VICTORIA SALINAS, SENIOR OFFICIAL PERFORMING THE DUTIES OF DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR, OFFICE OF RESILIENCE, FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY, FROM HON. RICK LARSEN

Question 1. The Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 included a provision requiring FEMA to increase the Public Assistance federal cost share for states that have implemented hazard mitigation measures including the enforcement of hazard resistant building codes and funding mitigation projects. This law creates a great incentive for states to proactively fund mitigation measures. This provision, however, still has not been implemented.

In 2023 responses submitted for the hearing record, FEMA committed to implementing this provision in the calendar year 2024. Can you confirm that timeline?

ANSWER. FEMA remains committed to implementing this provision.

Question 2. Do FEMA’s regional offices have the staff necessary to support the obligation of mitigation grants given the substantial increase in funding for such grants in recent years? Do all regions have dedicated staff working on mitigation grants? If not, are there plans to hire additional full-time staff in the regions?

ANSWER. FEMA and our Applicants greatly appreciate the historic increases in funding for much-needed investments in resilience nationwide. Through the BIL, signed into law in November 2021, Congress appropriated \$6.8 billion to FEMA to further the agency’s resilience efforts through the funding of five programs. This law is a once-in-a-generation investment which provided additional funding for each FY until 2026. Given the temporary nature of this funding and to ensure the expedited delivery of this assistance to communities, FEMA has been working with HQ and Regional Offices nationwide to increase the number of staff to support HMA program through additional hiring of 4-year temporary full time (TFT) employees. Currently, FEMA has hired more than 200 TFT and Cadre of On-Call Response/Recovery Employees (CORE) staff to support and expedite the additional BIL funding at Headquarters and the Regions. Each FEMA Region has dedicated staff working on HMA grant programs. In addition to positions paid for out of BIL, since 2019 FEMA has increased both permanent (Operations and Support) staff and Disaster Relief Fund CORE staff supporting the BRIC and HMGP programs from 87 to 474 at the end of FY 2023. Additionally, FEMA aims to more than double the number of FMA permanent staff by the end of FY 2025. FEMA continually assesses needs (which can vary from Region to Region) and, requests additional staff as appropriate to right-size staffing to meet the need. FEMA is also seeking to employ innovative solutions to update and streamline our operations and processes to better meet expanded program requirements. Some of these initiatives include deploying staff in strike teams to increase the speed of reviews and project approvals, improving, and streamlining data tracking and assessment, strengthening technical assistance, and improving training processes and effectiveness.

Question 3.a. What is the average length of time from award announcement to the applicant receiving funding for BRIC grants?

ANSWER. FEMA recognizes the importance of applicants receiving funding as quickly as possible. The sooner selections are made and funds are awarded, the sooner we can change the resilience trajectory for these entities. The amount of time it takes to award selected BRIC subapplications depends on several factors, primary amongst them being the completeness of the subapplication upon submission. In our commitment to assisting under-resourced communities in applying for our grants, FEMA also works with applicants to obtain all needed information prior to the award as well, which can affect overall timeline. FEMA has been tracking the time to initial obligation from the application close date. As of May 1, 2024, an analysis of a subset of BRIC subgrants showed that conservatively, 30 percent of subgrants received an initial obligation within 12 months of the application close date. There is about a 4–5-month gap between the application close date and selection. Of note, this figure represents initial obligations only and not complete awards. FEMA is actively working to improve its ability to track obligation data more granularly in the future. Like most complex projects, pre-award activities may take from one to two years. In some cases, with communities that have less capacity to implement more complex projects, this may take longer. The construction phase typically takes from two to three years. Given the scale and complexity of some projects and capacity of the applicant, this could take longer. FEMA expects construction on most projects to be completed within five to seven years. Closeout activities are performed during the final stages of the project.

The projects that are typically awarded the fastest have some similar characteristics, including less complex engineering and fewer EHP requirements.

Question 3.b. What is the average length of time from eligible project submission to the applicant receiving funding for HMGP grants?

ANSWER. HMGP provides funds to states, Tribes, and territories to implement projects that provide long-term hazard reduction after a major disaster. The purpose is to reduce the loss of life and property due to future natural disasters. On average, the median number of months from disaster declaration date (i.e., eligible project submission) to applicant receiving HMGP grant funding is 15 months. The amount of time it takes to award HMGP subapplications depends on several factors. In a typical process, states, Tribes, and territories prioritize subapplications for FEMA review and approval based on their FEMA-approved Hazard Mitigation Plan. FEMA reviews the subapplications to ensure they meet all HMA eligibility criteria. FEMA assumes that “eligible project submission” refers to the major disaster declaration date, as this is when applicants can begin submitting applications. However, based on a number of factors outlined below, using this milestone as the time to begin measurement may include time during which no applications have been submitted. Furthermore, some applicants may request an application deadline extension. One factor that impacts time to obligate includes the process of developing and submitting a subapplication for review, which is unique to each disaster and applicant. For applicants with existing HMGP funding, oversubscribed subapplications may be carried over to new disasters, allowing for the review process to begin immediately. Applicants may also work with subapplicants throughout the year to have “shelf ready” projects available for submission as soon as a disaster is declared.

Another factor that impacts time to obligation includes the applicant strategies around submission timing. Some applicants choose to submit projects as soon as they are able post-disaster, however this is not always the case. Other applicants do not submit projects until just prior to the deadline. These differences are due to several factors including impacts of the disaster, capability and capacity, project complexity, and mitigation priorities. HMGP is a FEMA-funded, state-managed mitigation program. The state hazard mitigation office has various internal state timelines and may have areas of focus for the mitigation grant funds based on the expected amount of mitigation funding because of the disaster. Additionally, the HMGP funding estimates are provided across three points in time within the open application period, with the first occurring within 35 calendar days of the major disaster declaration or soon thereafter. Depending on the severity of the disaster and accuracy of preliminary damage assessments, early funding estimates may only represent a portion of the total HMGP funding that is ultimately approved for a given disaster. At 12 months after the major disaster declaration, FEMA locks in the HMGP funding. Because of this, applicants may choose to delay submitting and wait to determine which subapplications to put forward based on more refined projections of available funding.

Question 4. Management costs on the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program are calculated based on actual Federal funds expended on a disaster. There are original estimates, but, until the federal funds are obligated and expended states cannot draw against those management costs. This causes a significant backlog at FEMA

and the appearance that applicants and sub-applicants are not utilizing the allowable management costs.

What can FEMA do to streamline this process and ensure states and locals can access these grant funds?

ANSWER. FEMA is committed to working quickly to assist recipients (states, Tribal nations and territories) as well as subrecipients (state agencies, local governments, federally recognized Tribal governments, and certain private nonprofit organizations) to receive management costs to implement HMGP projects. It is important to note that obligations under HMGP can occur at any point after the recipient has submitted an SF-424 and an Administrative Plan, and FEMA has issued the 30-day lock-in. A recipient may submit a management costs subapplication at any point during the open application period and can request a portion of the available management costs to be obligated (which is discussed in more detail below).

FEMA has taken steps to continue to assist recipients in receiving management costs. In the 2023 HMA Program and Policy Guide, FEMA changed its management cost policy to fix the amount of management costs available to recipients based on the amount of subapplications submitted by the end of the application period or when the total HMGP ceiling is calculated, whichever is later. FEMA made this policy change to give recipients certainty on the amount of management costs available to manage through the life of the award.

The total amount of management costs made available to a recipient and its subrecipients is based on the disaster's lock-in value, which is defined as the maximum amount of funding FEMA can obligate for eligible activities under the disaster. While lock-in ceilings are established 12 months after a major disaster declaration, recipients may request management costs as soon as they receive their 30-day lock-in estimates, which are provided within 35 calendar days of the major disaster declaration, or soon thereafter. Once FEMA reviews and approves these requests, the recipient may begin spending these funds. FEMA has seen that applicants take an average of 15 months post-declaration to submit both project funding and management costs requests. For management costs, partial funding is available as early as 30-days post-declaration. Review of management costs requests can be faster than requests to fund mitigation projects (due to the greater complexity associated with project reviews). A recipient may submit a management costs subapplication at any point during the open application period and can request a portion of the available management costs to be obligated. Recipients may request up to 25 percent of their estimated management cost amount after receiving their 30-day assistance estimate and up to 50 percent after the 6-month estimate. States with a Program Administration by States (PAS) designation may request up to 35 percent for the 30-day estimate and 75 percent for the six-month estimate. At the end of the application period—typically 12 months after the declaration date, unless an extension is requested—recipients may request the full management cost amount, minus a withholding amount of three percent (or two percent for PAS states) that becomes available at closeout.

For SLTT governments to receive subrecipient management costs from the funding awarded to the applicant, they must apply for management costs by including a management cost budget and narrative in their sub application. When the subapplication is submitted, subrecipient management cost is then reviewed and approved by the state and FEMA. As a matter of policy, FEMA does not permit the advancing of management cost payments, however if pre-award management costs are identified in the subapplication and are approved, reimbursement of those expenses are allowed.

Question 5. We understand from discussions with stakeholders that FEMA does not award the state set-aside for BRIC prior to beginning the evaluation of the nationally competitive projects, which may create a delay for grantees and subgrantees to begin pre-planned work prior to FEMA starting a separate application process.

What can be done to streamline this BRIC application process and ensure the state set-aside does not experience unnecessary delays?

ANSWER. FEMA understands the importance of making selections quickly so that funds can be awarded quickly. FEMA is focused on awarding all BRIC subapplications, to include those within the State and Territory Allocations and the Tribal Set-Aside, as quickly as possible. FEMA's goal is to make selections (and the awards that follow), as soon as possible, so subapplicants can begin implementing projects and activities to reduce risk and increase their resiliency.

In pursuit of a streamlined review process and to help ensure that applicants and subapplicants can maximize all available BRIC funding, FEMA is undertaking a national review process for competitive and non-competitive subapplications (under the State/Territory Allocations and the Tribal Set-Aside). For FY 2021 and FY 2022,

BRIC made selections for the BRIC State and Territory Allocation and the Tribal Set-Aside months before making selections in the national competition. Funds are awarded from these selections once projects clear all pre-award activities.

Question 6. We have heard from various stakeholders that despite FEMA's best efforts, programs such as BRIC, HMGP, and other mitigation programs have high entry costs which are prohibitively expensive to rural and disadvantaged communities. These costs come in the form of planning and review requirements, complicated applications, and protracted processes that quickly become expensive to severely understaffed organizations.

We realize FEMA recently hired a Small State and Rural Advocate, but beyond that, what can the agency do to ensure these states and communities have every opportunity to participate in these programs?

ANSWER. As the number of natural disasters and the severity of the impacts continues to increase, there is a need to support communities, families, and businesses with the financial resources they need to build resilience and reduce disaster suffering prior to the next event. FEMA has taken several actions to increase equitable access to HMA grant funding, through increasing technical assistance and other capacity building activities, reducing burdens of the application process and conditions for entry, and enhancing outreach through engagements and updated materials.

FEMA offers non-financial direct technical assistance (DTA) through the BRIC grant program. It provides direct support to selected communities and Tribal Nations (through a letter of interest that they send to FEMA) for broad assistance to help improve resiliency to natural hazards, sustain successful mitigation programs, submit high-quality subapplications for hazard mitigation, and/or implement innovative projects to reduce risk. FEMA offers a wide range of non-financial support to BRIC DTA communities, including climate risk assessments, community engagement, partnership building, and mitigation and climate adaptation planning. Support for BRIC DTA communities can range from pre-application activities to grant closeout. Applicants submit requests for assistance during the annual application period.

FEMA currently supports 74 communities and Tribal Nations through BRIC DTA. For the FY 2023 submission period, FEMA received an additional 170 requests for assistance—31 of which were from federally recognized Tribal Nations, 135 communities and four territories across all 10 FEMA regions. FEMA will be selecting at least 80 new communities, including Tribal Nations, from the FY 2023 submissions, which will bring the total number of BRIC DTA recipients to over 154. For those not selected via this round of assistance, FEMA, through regional offices, will provide communities, Tribal nations, and territories with information about technical assistance offerings from other entities to help them meet their resilience needs. Of note, the FMA grant program also provides grants to states for technical assistance to local governments.

FMA is a competitive program that provides funding to states, federally recognized Tribal governments, U.S. territories, and local governments. Since the National Flood Insurance Reform Act of 1994 was signed into law, funds are used for projects that reduce or eliminate the risk of repetitive flood damage to buildings insured by the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). FEMA also delivers technical assistance through HMGP that focuses on making mitigation dollars more accessible for communities that are less equipped to navigate the grant process. We work with states, local, Tribal and territories' governments to provide targeted technical assistance directly to underserved communities that often struggle with limited technical resources and programmatic knowledge so they can develop applications. This targeted technical assistance may include support with initiatives such as developing mitigations strategies or supporting planning-related activities. This technical assistance is provided through Hazard Mitigation Technical Assistance Program contracts rather than a specific technical assistance initiative, like BRIC.

Recognizing that not all Applicants and subapplicants have the capability and/or capacity to apply for and manage a BRIC project grant, capability and capacity building activities are also activities eligible for funding under BRIC. In addition to hazard mitigation planning activities, this can also include activities that support the development of future projects, such as project scoping activities or a phased project approach, both of which could help bridge the gap in the level of detail between a project concept and a complete project subapplication.

FEMA is making access to programs more equitable for highly disadvantaged communities by addressing one of the challenges identified by our partners: the successful completion of a project BCA—previously a required part of the application process for HMA funding. While mitigation measures must still meet cost-effectiveness requirements, as of May 2024, FEMA removed the requirement of a BCA as

a condition to apply for HMA funding for Economically Disadvantaged Rural Communities, small and impoverished communities, federally recognized Tribal governments, or subapplicants with a hazard mitigation project within or primarily benefiting a Community Disaster Resilience Zone. FEMA will review the hazard mitigation project subapplications that are competitive and otherwise eligible for selection and may assist such communities or tribal governments with developing a BCA. In addition, all subapplicants may submit a cost effectiveness narrative, rather than a BCA, for projects costing less than \$1 million. FEMA will conduct the BCA for these projects less than \$1 million to ensure cost effectiveness.

FEMA adheres to OMB Circular A-94, which reduced the discount rate from seven percent to 3.1 percent in November 2023. FEMA also incorporated distributional weights, and updated the pre-calculated benefit amounts that can be readily used to determine hazard mitigation project cost-effectiveness in our BCA toolkit. We have streamlined cost-effectiveness in its mitigation grant programs making it easier to approve hazard mitigation projects, especially those that are innovative in nature, build climate resilience, and benefit underserved communities.

Another way FEMA helps to reduce the burden on Applicants and subapplicants is by providing reimbursement for some pre-award costs. Applicants and subapplicants may be able to get reimbursed for certain types of pre-award costs that are directly related to developing a BRIC subapplication that is awarded. Such costs may have been incurred prior to application submission, for example gathering data to be used for preparing environmental reviews required by the National Environmental Policy Act or developing a BCA, preparing design specifications, or conducting workshops or meetings related to development and submission of subapplications.

FEMA made adjustments to the point scoring criteria for the BRIC and FMA grant programs to make it easier for disadvantaged and/or traditionally underserved communities to receive funding. For BRIC, in addition to Economically Disadvantaged Rural Communities, priority points are now offered to federally recognized tribal governments and for subapplications for a project within or primarily benefiting a Community Disaster Resilience Zone to be more competitive in the national competition. For FMA, it increased the final priority scoring points and federal cost share to 90 percent for socially vulnerable communities (using the CDC Social Vulnerability Index, specifically Socioeconomic Status, Household Characteristics, and Housing Type and Transportation).

These two programs are also part of the Justice40 Initiative to deliver at least 40 percent of the overall benefits of certain federal climate, clean energy, affordable and sustainable housing, and other investments to disadvantaged communities that are marginalized by underinvestment and overburdened by pollution.

We will deliver nearly \$1.6 billion to disadvantaged communities, accounting for over 53 percent of the almost \$3 billion total in FY 2022 funding.

Through the Safeguarding Tomorrow through Ongoing Risk Mitigation Revolving Loan Fund program, FEMA works closely with applicants to learn better ways to make administrative tasks easier, increase capability, reach resilience and equity goals, and identify common projects and activities for loans under the program. Based on feedback and lessons learned from the first year of the program, FEMA has updated the grant application forms and supporting materials to ensure the application process is as streamlined as possible. FEMA aims to reduce complexity and barriers for applicants to better understand the information required for a selection and allocation.

FEMA addresses the disaster survivor experience by speeding up the delivery of flood mitigation funding through the FMA Swift Current opportunity. FEMA released \$300 million in FY 2023 to reduce or eliminate the impacts of flooding for repetitively or substantially flood-damaged properties insured through the NFIP. FEMA offers tailored pre-application support to assist FMA Swift Current applicants and subapplicants with subapplication development. FEMA will continue to evaluate and solicit feedback from its customers to build from the success of the prior funding opportunities through future grant cycles.

In FY 2022, FEMA made available \$60 million that was distributed across 326 properties in four states impacted by Hurricane Ida. Within one year from the close of the application period, over 80 percent of the funding was awarded to Louisiana, Mississippi, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

For the second announcement in 2023, FEMA made available a total of \$300 million and expanded criteria to benefit more places, which as of May 30 includes 20 states and one Tribal Nation.

FEMA is ensuring that stakeholders have straightforward and equitable access to HMA programs, which includes reducing barriers to access and providing focused assistance to underserved communities. For example:

- Hosted several national webinars and posting recordings on FEMA.gov and FEMA's YouTube channel.
- Updated our HMA Program and Policy Guide through reducing complexity to make it easier for customers to know how to successfully apply for funding.
- Developed program and application support materials to help customers navigate the grant processes.
- We recently hosted our Hazard Mitigation Partners Workshop which brought nearly 1,000 attendees virtually together in a highly education-focused grant forum to talk through our hazard mitigation and floodplain management work to build capacity to withstand tomorrow's hazards.

The Community Disaster Resilience Zones initiative, which is part of implementing the Community Disaster Resilience Zones Act of 2022, is designed to prioritize support for the most at-risk communities in the country, including those that are severely understaffed, under-resourced, and overburdened. In addition to providing technical and financial assistance to these communities through FEMA's BRIC and FMA programs, the zone designations can also help the private sector, nonprofits, philanthropies, and other non-federal partners target investments in community resilience.

FEMA has developed a network of support of 11 programs from 8 other federal agencies to support and prioritize Community Disaster Resilience Zones. Seven of these programs provide technical assistance to disadvantaged communities. One example is the U.S. Department of Transportation's Thriving Communities Network, which provides technical assistance to disadvantaged communities to help plan and build transformative transportation projects that improve mobility, sustainability, and resilience.

Another example is the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Partners Network (RPN), an all-of-government program that assists rural communities identify resources and funding to create jobs, build infrastructure, and support long-term economic stability on their own terms. Twenty-three federal departments, agencies, and commissions, including the Appalachian Regional Commission and the Denali Commission, are members of the network. The RPN is leveraging its critical networked assistance to support the 178 Community Disaster Resilience Zones identified in rural areas.

A third example is the Economic Development Administration's new Economic Recovery Corps, designed to accelerate recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in distressed communities and regions throughout the U.S. by connecting organizations with the talent and capacity needed to advance new ways of doing economic development that promote economic resilience and transformative change.

QUESTIONS TO VICTORIA SALINAS, SENIOR OFFICIAL PERFORMING THE DUTIES OF DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR, OFFICE OF RESILIENCE, FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY, FROM HON. JENNIFFER GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN

Question 1. Six and a half years after Hurricane Maria, four years after the 2020 earthquakes, Puerto Rico is STILL in the process of approving and performing recovery work for municipalities, nonprofits, faith institutions, individuals.

The next disaster is not a matter of "if" but of "when" and "how much". Effective plans measures to provide hazard mitigation and a resilient infrastructure in all its modalities are critical to face this reality. I AM an advocate of preventive measures that are not limited to mere "hardening" of infrastructure or paying to rebuild the same thing over and over, but making it possible for communities to recover more quickly or to have flexible courses of action.

Question 1.a. The FEMA funding programs right now are also facing issues regarding rising costs not just due to inflation but to supply chain and workforce availability issues and the expected effect of delays or prolonged projects. There are many projects that were approved based on estimates that by now have been far outstripped. How does this affect the mitigation plans? How does the Agency address this?

ANSWER. FEMA has been and continues to work closely with community officials in Puerto Rico to help rebuild after these catastrophic events. Hurricane Maria is the largest disaster for FEMA's HMGP. Over time, cost overruns may indeed occur as a result of infeasible cost estimates, underestimated complexity, prolonged schedules, labor availability, supply chain issues, or other reasons.

When managing grants under the HMGP, the recipient must notify FEMA as soon as a cost underrun or overrun is identified. The recipient may request additional federal assistance for identified overruns, which FEMA may approve if program assistance is available under the grant award. Because there is an overall cap on the HMGP grant award, the recipient the Puerto Rico Central Office for Recovery, Reconstruction, and Resiliency (COR3) can manage individual subgrants within that cap amount but cannot exceed the overall cap on the grant award. The subaward must continue to meet cost share and eligibility requirements. In essence, applicants may use funding from cost underruns on a given project to apply to cost overruns on another project.

Also, as per regulation 2 CFR 200.433, inflation costs can be an eligible cost for project budgets. Inflation can be included as a separate line item if the applicant provides appropriate justification. Specifically, 2 CFR 200.433(a) states “a budget estimate of future costs which is associated with possible events or conditions arising from causes the precise outcome of which is indeterminable at the time of estimate, and that experience shows will likely result, in aggregate, in additional costs” and “It is permissible for contingency amounts other than those excluded in paragraph (a) of this section to be explicitly included in budget estimates, to the extent they are necessary to improve the precision of those estimates.” In addition, applicants can account for potential project cost increases by using recognized national construction and building cost estimation guides such as Marshall & Swift, R.S. Means, and similar publications.

Finally, though not specifically for cost overruns, project budgets can also include contingency costs of 1–7 percent depending upon specific circumstances. Such costs could be used to cover cost overruns if necessary.

Hazard mitigation plans help state, local, Tribal, and territorial (SLTT) governments build long-term, equitable solutions that reduce risk from natural hazards. Mitigation plans describe and prioritize hazard mitigation actions and establish a strategy to implement those actions, including identifying responsible offices and potential funding sources to implement those actions. Mitigation plans are required to be reviewed and updated every five years to reflect changes in risk as well as mitigation priorities.

Updates to the mitigation plans must consider changes in the community’s capabilities to implement their mitigation strategy, and may include changes in project costs or changes to available funding. However, mitigation plans are not required to include the level of detail for fully scoped projects with cost estimates that are required for grant applications.

Question 1.b. What has been FEMA’s experience working with the Puerto Rico Central Office of Recovery Rebuilding and Resiliency, COR3, in the approval and obligation of mitigation funding?

ANSWER. FEMA’s Mitigation team in the Joint Recovery Office works with COR3 to ensure the submitted subapplications are eligible, complete, and feasible. FEMA and COR3 meet regularly to establish priorities and to follow up on milestones and action items. Also, both agencies deliver continuous technical assistance to Sub-applicants helping to respond to additional information requests on a project scope or provide subject matter expertise on a proposed mitigation project.

Question 1.c. In the specific case of Puerto Rico’s electric power grid, can you provide us a breakdown of how the FEMA mitigation support has been utilized, including what if any changes have been necessary in procedures or guidance over the past few years?

ANSWER. Puerto Rico’s electrical grid is interdependent and requires a holistic approach for Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority (PREPA) infrastructure projects to mitigate against future disasters. As such, FEMA undertook a significant effort to revise the approach for determining cost effectiveness for projects designed to mitigate future risks to the overall electrical grid. Demonstrating cost effectiveness, typically done with the BCA toolkit provided by FEMA, can be a impediment for applicants in developing quality mitigation grant applications. A concerted effort was made by FEMA Headquarters and the PR Joint Recovery Office to develop the first ever Island Wide Benefit Cost Analysis (IWBCA) that is supporting PREPA’s efforts toward reconstructing a more resilient electrical grid that will reduce the impacts of future disasters.

The IWBCA aligns with the Public Assistance (PA) FEMA Accelerated Awards Strategy (FAASt) (announced in 2020), in which critical infrastructure programs are grouped together to expedite critical energy work in PR. The PA FAASt project treats all PREPA infrastructure as a single, island-wide set of interconnected and interdependent components. The aggregated IWBCA applies the same approach for purposes of evaluating the cost-effectiveness of proposed hazard mitigation meas-

ures, with one BCA applied to the entire FAASt project that includes benefits based on future costs avoided of physical damage to the infrastructure, costs related to the response and reconnection effort, and the loss of function for electric service caused by the storm. The IWBCA approach streamlines the cost-effectiveness review of mitigation projects under one IWBCA umbrella. Defining the maximum benefit in this way greatly simplifies funding and cost-effectiveness requirements. The IWBCA enables FEMA to avoid double counting of benefits and allows for coordination across the PREPA infrastructure on PA Mitigation and HMGP implementation, thereby avoiding both duplication of programs and gaps in the system's disaster resilience. The IWBCA applies to all mitigation measures associated with PREPA funded by the PA and HMGP programs. To ensure that, following system reconstruction, PREPA infrastructure is resilient and meets all applicable codes and standards, PA and HMGP will fund hazard mitigation measures that meet all program requirements, including a cost-effectiveness evaluation using the IWBCA.

FEMA approved the use of aggregated benefits defined in the IWBCA to all PA Mitigation and HMGP PREPA projects under DR-4339-PR, helping to expedite the funding of, and satisfying the cost-effectiveness requirements for, projects eligible under Sections 404 and 406 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. §§ 5170c and 5172). The projects still must meet applicable legal and programmatic eligibility requirements. These efforts resulted in \$7.6 billion in Total Hazard Mitigation Benefits (Estimated total benefits for both 404 and 406 Mitigation (FEMA Public Assistance Mitigation)). This is a novel and impactful approach to demonstrating cost effectiveness which should facilitate a more streamlined application review and approval process. This approach takes a holistic viewpoint of the electrical grid so as to avoid individual, piecemeal cost effectiveness determinations on every project. This is the largest project of its kind and FEMA will continue to investigate ways where this approach may benefit other infrastructure types.

QUESTION TO VICTORIA SALINAS, SENIOR OFFICIAL PERFORMING THE DUTIES OF DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR, OFFICE OF RESILIENCE, FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY, FROM HON. MIKE EZELL

Question 1. In recent community engagements across various regions, constituents and stakeholders have expressed concerns regarding the apparent disparity in the disbursement of BRIC (Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities) funding from state aside dollars. BRIC funding, designed to bolster resilience and mitigate risks in communities, is expected to be one of the faster-flowing financial resources. However, reports suggest that certain regions are experiencing delays or inadequate allocation, hindering their ability to implement crucial resilience measures.

To address these concerns comprehensively, please provide the total dollars obligated and allocated (paid) under BRIC funding, disaggregated by state set-aside, tribal set-aside, building code plus-up, and competitive program. Please provide the total dollars obligated and allocated (paid), deobligated and reasons for deobligations for each state by fiscal year beginning with Fiscal Year 2020. Please segment by the designated categories: state set-aside, tribal set-aside, building code plus-up, and competitive program.

ANSWER. The BRIC program's state and territory allocations help to ensure that all states and territories have an opportunity to apply for and receive BRIC funding. This allocation, combined with the separate set-aside specifically for Tribes, contributes to geographically disbursed awards.

Under the state/territory allocations, Applicants (States and Territories) establish criteria and rank subapplications from local communities. FEMA then takes the selections of the state/territory to move them through the award process. Given that the set-aside is to state and territories, FEMA does not have mechanism in place for subapplicants (such as municipalities or communities) to grieve or contest the applicant rankings. This would be handled at the applicant level. In rare circumstances, FEMA may fund eligible subapplications out of priority order due to insufficient funding, duplicate subapplications, program priorities, and/or other pertinent information. During the FY 2023 BRIC funding cycle FEMA allocated \$2 million to each state/territory and set aside \$50 million for tribal applicants. New in 2023, FEMA also allocated \$2 million to each state/territory to carry out eligible building code adoption and enforcement activities and set aside \$25 million for tribal applicants to do the same. This is in addition to the more than \$700 million in funding made available under the national competition. FEMA recognizes the im-

portance of obligating BRIC funds to communities as quickly as possible, so that communities can start their own path towards resilience.

Please see Attachment A which includes publicly available data that can be found on the OpenFEMA platform. Of note, the requested data is not available yet for the building code plus up, as the FY 2023 grant cycle was the first year to include the building code plus up. Overall, this attachment shows:

- Approximate Obligations as a Percent of Total Selected Amount:
 - 2020: 47 percent
 - 2021: 32 percent
 - 2022: Seven percent
- Approximate Obligations as a Percent of Total Selected Amount (By Type):
 - National Competition: 18 percent
 - State/Territory Allocation: 73 percent
 - Tribal Set-Aside: 34 percent
 - Management Costs: 12 percent

Attachment A includes data related to de obligated funds. FEMA does not actively track reasons for de-obligations in its system.

[Editor's note: Attachment A is retained in committee files.]

