

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 8, 2025

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

Dear Secretary Noem,

I am writing to request from your Department the Federal Emergency Management Administration's (FEMA) 2025 hurricane response plan. When you testified on May 20, 2025, before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs regarding the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) budget request for Fiscal Year 2026, I expressed my concern over reports that the senior official performing the duties of Administrator, David Richardson, told FEMA staff members on Thursday, May 15, that FEMA had not yet completed its 2025 hurricane season plan, stating to these staff members on a conference call: "I would say we're about 80 or 85% there [...] We'll never have 100% of a plan [...] However, we will do our best to make sure that the plan is all-encompassing."¹

In response to my line of questioning highlighting these concerns in our May 20 hearing, you stated that Mr. Richardson "is working diligently with the employees at FEMA, and [they] are prepared for hurricane season[.]" and that you "have been actively engaged in hurricane response and preparation" as well. Additionally, when I asked if DHS could share its 2025 hurricane season plan with the Committee, you said that you would confer with the Department and stated your belief that this is a document DHS would be able to provide. At the time of writing, the Committee has yet to receive FEMA's 2025 hurricane response plan or any further information from DHS on the status of the plan.

As you know, the 2025 hurricane season began on June 1 and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has predicted a 60% chance of an above-normal season, "forecasting a range of 13 to 19 total named storms[.]"² This will, of course, follow the 2024 Atlantic hurricane season, which was the deadliest in nearly two decades, resulting in at least 335

¹ Luke Barr, "FEMA 'not ready' for hurricane season, internal review finds," *ABC News*, May 15, 2025. <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/fema-ready-hurricane-season-internal-review-finds/story?id=121837637>

² *National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration*, "NOAA predicts above-normal 2025 Atlantic hurricane season," May 22, 2025. <https://www.noaa.gov/news-release/noaa-predicts-above-normal-2025-atlantic-hurricane-season>

deaths and an estimated \$190 billion in damage.³ This context makes FEMA's considerable staff reductions all the more alarming, as they risk leaving FEMA ill-equipped to manage responding to catastrophic storms. Reports indicate that FEMA lost approximately a quarter of its full-time staff this year, however, a 2023 GAO report found that at "the beginning of fiscal year 2022, FEMA [already] had [...] an overall staffing gap of approximately 6,200 staff (35 percent) across different positions."⁴ The departures this year threaten to compound the massive demands being placed on what was an already strained workforce.

Across the nation, we see time and time again how deadly and destructive natural disasters can be, most recently in the catastrophic flash flooding in Central Texas over the July 4 weekend that has already taken over 100 lives. The increasing frequency and severity of hurricanes and other extreme weather events coupled with FEMA's shrinking workforce and diminishing capacity are of concern to this Committee and the countless New Jerseyans impacted by Superstorm Sandy, the worst natural disaster in our state's history, which caused 38 fatalities and approximately \$30 billion in damage.⁵ The reports of FEMA's incomplete 2025 hurricane season plan on the cusp of the start of hurricane season and DHS' slowness in providing the plan to this Committee are equally unsettling. Moreover, any such plan must detail how FEMA's lifesaving missions will not be hindered by your recent directive requiring all Department obligations over \$100,000 to be reviewed and approved by you prior to obligation—especially since the memorandum stated that your office would take a minimum of five days to complete each review.⁶ This added layer of bureaucracy threatens to delay work that could mean the difference between life and death for disaster victims, and it is unclear how FEMA will be able to comply with this directive without sacrificing its duty to protect people before, during, and after disasters.

Therefore, I am once again requesting your Department provide the final or most recent draft of its 2025 hurricane season plan to the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs as soon as possible. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

³ Dinah Voyles Pulver, "Hurricane season ends Saturday. It was one of the deadliest in recent memory," *USA Today*, November 30, 2024. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2024/11/30/2024-atlantic-hurricane-season-ends-with-at-least-335-us-deaths/76619181007/>; Greg Allen, "The 2024 Atlantic hurricane season was the deadliest in nearly two decades," *NPR*, November 29, 2024. <https://www.npr.org/2024/11/27/nx-s1-5205099/2024-atlantic-hurricane-season-ends>

⁴ U.S. Government Accountability Office, "FEMA Disaster Workforce: Actions Needed to Improve Hiring Data and Address Staffing Gaps," May 2, 2023. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-23-105663>

⁵ *New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection*, "Remembering Superstorm Sandy," October 26, 2022. <https://dep.nj.gov/sandy-10/>

⁶ Gabe Cohen, "Noem demands more control over FEMA and Homeland Security funding, which could slow disaster response," *CNN*, June 18, 2025. <https://www.cnn.com/2025/06/18/politics/kristi-noem-fema-dhs-funding>.



Andy Kim

Ranking Member

Subcommittee on Disaster Management, District of Columbia, and Census

Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs