TAXPAYERS for COMMON SENSE

November 17, 2026

Dear Chairman Strong, Ranking Member Kennedy, and Members of the Subcommittee on Emergency Management and Technology:

For more than 30 years, Taxpayers for Common Sense has advocated for disaster spending reforms and policies that deliver better outcomes for communities and taxpayers alike. We appreciate the committee's commitment to continued congressional oversight. In announcing this hearing, Chairman Strong emphasized the importance of ensuring that states and local communities have the resources they need before, during, and after disasters strike. We share that priority and believe effective oversight is essential to ensuring FEMA can fulfill its mission efficiently and responsibly.

With disaster costs spiraling and supplemental appropriations becoming the norm, this is the moment to strengthen our nation's emergency management capabilities and ensure disaster dollars deliver real value to communities. However, it is equally crucial that any reforms to FEMA be driven by demonstrated needs, implemented methodically and transparently, and ensure the federal government is ready to provide communities timely, fair, and accountable assistance in their moments of need.

In advance of the Subcommittee's hearing entitled "Beyond the Storm: Assessing FEMA's Mission Readiness," we would like to raise the following taxpayer considerations and questions for Administrator Hamilton:

- **How is FEMA determining which responsibilities can be transferred to states without compromising disaster readiness? How will the agency ensure those changes actually reduce disaster costs rather than simply shift them?**
    - As TCS explained in *Two Paths to Federal Disaster Reform*, building state capacity is a worthy goal. But states have different resources and capabilities, and there is a reason FEMA exists. When a major disaster overwhelms a state, the federal government needs to be ready to step in with the personnel, equipment and expertise that states may not (and frankly shouldn't have to) have. That is the very basis of federalism.
    - An August 2026 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report found that FEMA reduced its workforce without the strategic planning needed to

understand the consequences. Before shifting more responsibilities to states or further reducing FEMA's capabilities, Congress needs to know whether those changes will leave communities better prepared or simply with fewer resources when disaster strikes.

- **What is FEMA doing to address delays in mitigation funding, and how is the agency determining which investments will do the most to reduce future disaster losses?**
    - A September 2026 GAO report found that approximately 700 applications associated with $2.2 billion in mitigation funding were still awaiting decisions as of March 2025. These are projects intended to reduce damage before disasters happen which in the end reduces taxpayer costs. Every year communities wait for decisions is another year they remain exposed to those risks.
    - We know mitigation can save taxpayers money. As TCS recently highlighted, the Congressional Budget Office estimates that every $1 billion invested in federal flood prevention and mitigation could prevent $3 billion to $4 billion in damages over 30 years. Other estimates are that the mitigation return on investment is even higher. The question is whether FEMA is getting those dollars to the projects that will make the biggest difference, and whether it can demonstrate the savings.
- **What specific steps is FEMA taking to make disaster assistance faster and simpler, especially for smaller communities that lack the resources to navigate complicated federal requirements or pay recovery costs upfront?**
    - Communities and individuals recovering from disasters should not have to spend months navigating complicated applications and duplicative reporting requirements, especially considering their means to navigate those processes may have been destroyed in the disaster. In our recent comments on the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, we emphasized that FEMA can collect the information it needs to protect taxpayers without making the process unnecessarily burdensome for applicants.
    - The reimbursement system presents another problem. Smaller communities may not have the cash on hand to begin rebuilding while they wait for federal assistance. TCS has supported moving toward more predictable, grant-based assistance that gets money to communities sooner while maintaining appropriate safeguards.

- **How can FEMA give Congress and the public a clearer picture of where disaster dollars are going, what those investments are accomplishing, and what the agency is learning from past disasters?**
    - Congress routinely appropriates billions of dollars for disaster recovery, often through emergency supplemental funding. Yet it can be difficult to determine how much has actually reached communities, how long projects have been waiting, or whether the money is producing the intended results. Better tracking of spending and outstanding obligations would help Congress identify problems before they become more expensive.
    - We should also be learning more from each disaster. TCS has recommended an independent fact-finding body, similar to the National Transportation Safety Board, to examine major disasters and identify lessons learned — what could be done differently as well as what went right. A relatively small train collision or shipboard fire initiates an NTSB investigation, but a major disaster costing taxpayers tens of billions of dollars does not get a similar response. Without that kind of independent assessment, we risk making the same mistakes and paying for them again.

The bipartisan FEMA Act (H.R. 4669) includes many important provisions that would benefit taxpayers, and Congress has an opportunity to build on that work. FEMA reform must strengthen the nation's ability to respond when disasters strike while addressing the policies that continue to drive up disaster costs.

We urge the Subcommittee to use this hearing to seek clear answers about FEMA's readiness and performance and to pursue reforms that reduce future disaster losses while protecting taxpayers.

Sincerely,

Steve Ellis
President
Taxpayers for Common Sense