United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 6, 2026

The Honorable Markwayne Mullin
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave SE
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Mullin,

Congratulations on being confirmed as Secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). As you acknowledged in your confirmation hearing, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has a great mission, but needs to be more effective.[1] We share your interest in pursuing meaningful FEMA reform. As the agency turns a new page, under your leadership, we write to outline several priorities that we hope to advance together.

Improve FEMA's Disaster Response and Recovery Timeline

Delays in approving disaster aid requests were a persistent issue under your predecessor. Former Secretary Noem instituted a policy requiring her approval of all expenses exceeding $100,000.[2] Rather than improving fiscal efficiency, this policy all but paralyzed FEMA's ability to serve the American people in a timely manner.

As of September 2025, former Secretary Noem's policy had delayed approval of or left approval pending for 1,034 contract, grant, or disaster assistance awards.[3] In Vermont alone, there are 108 pending home buyouts attributable to catastrophic flooding in 2023 and 2024 that represent over $35 million in aid.

Delays in aid stall communities' progress toward recovery after disasters. As you testified in your confirmation hearing, "Taking years to get reimbursed is not acceptable. Taking, honestly, months to get reimbursed is not acceptable."[4] We support your decision to eliminate former Secretary Noem's approval threshold policy.[5] We also look forward to working with you to find

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[1] *Nomination of the Honorable Markwayne Mullin to be Sec'y, U.S. Department of Homeland Sec.*, *Hearing Before the S. Comm. on Homeland Sec. & Gov't Affairs*, 119th Cong. (2026), https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/hearings/nomination-of-the-honorable-markwayne-mullin-to-be-secretary-u-s-department-of-homeland-security/.

[2] *See Maxine Joselow et al., Noem's Spending Rule Causes Delays at Homeland Security Dept.*, NY TIMES (Aug. 21, 2025), https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/21/us/kristi-noem-spending-contracts-homelandsecurity-department.html.

[3] *See* Minority Staff of S. Comm. on Homeland Security, 119th Cong., Report on Delayed by Design: Disaster Survivors Left Behind by DHS Secretary Noem's $100,000 Approval Policy, at 1 (2026).

[4] *See Nomination of the Honorable Markwayne Mullin to be Sec'y*, *supra* note 1.

[5] *See* Jasper Ward, *DHS Cancels Policy Requiring Secretary to Review Contracts over $100,000*, REUTERS (Apr. 1, 2026), https://www.reuters.com/legal/litigation/dhs-cancels-policy-requiring-secretary-review-contracts-over-100000-2026-04-02/.

more ways to streamline FEMA's funding approval process and ensure disaster aid reaches people in need in a timely manner.

Support an Experienced FEMA Administrator to Improve Staffing and Culture

A lack of consistent, qualified leadership at FEMA has compromised the Agency's mission. FEMA is currently operating under its third temporary head in fifteen months, fueling widespread uncertainty among employees and policy whiplash that hampers the Agency's ability to fulfill its mission.[6] President Trump's temporary picks to lead FEMA lack the legally required emergency management experience to serve as the Acting Administrator of FEMA.[7] The responsibilities of FEMA demand a permanent, qualified head who is devoted to improving the Agency's operations. We urge you to swiftly fulfill your commitment to ensure an experienced emergency manager is nominated to run FEMA.[8]

FEMA also requires consistent staffing to carry out its emergency management and disaster response duties. We have already seen the consequences of ill-considered staffing cuts carried out by former Secretary Noem. In January 2026, in the face of a major winter storm, the Agency scrambled to pause the termination of roughly 200 disaster workers.[9] While we are thankful these employees are being offered the opportunity to return, FEMA is still facing a dire workforce shortage.[10] Over the last year and a half, FEMA reportedly lost one third of its full-time staff.[11] During your confirmation hearing, you testified that as Homeland Security Secretary you will ensure FEMA is "adequately staffed to respond to our nation's disasters."[12] We urge you to uphold this commitment.

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[6] *See* Rachel Frazin, *Embattled FEMA Faces Yet Another Shake-Up*, THE HILL (Nov. 18, 2025), https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/5611491-trump-fema-leadership-dhs/.

[7] Under federal law, the FEMA Administrator "shall be appointed from among individual who have (A) a demonstrated ability in and knowledge of emergency management and homeland security; and (B) not less than 5 years of executive leadership and management experience in the public or private sector." 6 U.S. Code § 313 (c)(2). *See* Scott Dance and Maxine Joselow, *Acting FEMA Administrator Is Out, Injecting Uncertainty at Agency in Limbo*, NY TIMES (Nov. 17, 2025), https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/17/climate/fema-david-richardson.html; Brianna Sacks, *Former FEMA Leader Set to Return After Being Ousted*, WASH. POST (Apr. 16, 2026), https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2026/04/16/cameron-hamilton-fema-leader/.

[8] *See Nomination of the Honorable Markwayne Mullin to be Sec'y*, *supra* note 1.

[9] *See* Gabe Cohen, *FEMA Reinstates Whistleblowers as Trump Administration Reverses Noem's Policies*, CNN (Apr. 30, 2026), https://www.cnn.com/2026/04/30/politics/fema-whistleblower-dhs-noem-mullin?cid=ios_app.

[10] *See* Gabriela Aoun Anguiera, *FEMA Tells Court it is Offering Jobs Back to Employees Who Were Let Go in January*, FEDERAL NEWS NETWORK (May 4, 2026), https://federalnewsnetwork.com/litigation/2026/05/fema-tells-court-it-is-offering-jobs-back-to-employees-who-were-let-go-in-january/.

[11] *See* Leah Douglas and Nathan Layne, *Staff Losses and Low Morale are Derailing FEMA Hurricane Preparations, Internal Document Says*, REUTERS (May 15, 2025), https://www.reuters.com/world/us/fema-chief-says-agency-will-raise-state-burden-disasters-50-2025-05-15/.

[12] *See Nomination of the Honorable Markwayne Mullin to be Sec'y*, *supra* note 1.

Promote Accountability and Transparency at FEMA

We also hope that you will promote a culture of transparency and accountability at DHS and within FEMA. Under the leadership of former Secretary Noem, the report compiled by President Trump's FEMA Review Council—detailing recommendations on comprehensive FEMA reforms—was not released to the public.[13] In December 2025, the White House abruptly cancelled the Council's final meeting where it was set to release the report.[14] While we were encouraged to see the Council 's meeting to release the report rescheduled for May 7, we urge you to work with Congress before implementing any recommendations from the report, as you committed to during your confirmation hearing.

Further, under former Secretary Noem's leadership, DHS routinely ignored or delayed responding to legislative oversight requests—including requests related to the FEMA Review Council.[15] Senators also have not received responses to questions for the record (QFR) from former Secretary Noem's March 3rd hearing in the Senate Committee on the Judiciary.[16] We ask that your Department promptly respond to these outstanding requests, which we have enclosed for your review. Finally, according to the DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG), your predecessor obstructed multiple OIG investigations.[17] We urge you to reverse course and allow the OIG to complete its work.

Respect FEMA's Legally Defined Role as a Separate Entity

We also hope to work with you to reaffirm FEMA's independence within DHS. Secretaries have always had some level of leadership and control over the actions at FEMA. However, after the failed response to Hurricane Katrina, Congress passed the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act (PKEMRA), which established FEMA as an independent entity within DHS. PKEMRA limits the DHS Secretary's authority over FEMA's mission and responsibilities. Former Secretary Noem repeatedly violated PKEMRA by directing actions at FEMA that

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[13] *See* Rachel Frazin, *Trump's FEMA Council Eyed Major Cuts. Will Mullin Enact Them as DHS Head?,* THE HILL (Mar. 24, 2026), https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/5796864-markwayne-mullin-dhs-fema-review-council/.

[14] *See* Gabe Cohen, *White House Officials Abruptly Postpone Final Meeting of Trump-Created FEMA Task Force*, CNN (Dec. 11, 2025), https://www.cnn.com/2025/12/11/politics/white-house-postponefema-meeting; Lauren Sommer, *Communities are Waiting on Billions in Disaster Funding from the Trump Administration*, NPR (Apr. 10, 2026), https://www.npr.org/2026/04/10/nx-s1-5770433/delay-funding-fema-hurricanes-disasters-wildfires-floods.

[15] *See* Letter from U.S. Senator Peter Welch to U.S. Dep't of Homeland Sec. Secretary Kristi Noem (Dec. 10, 2025), https://www.welch.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/20251012-Letter-to-SecretaryNoem-on-FEMA-Council-Report.pdf; Letter from U.S. Senators Peter Welch and Chris Van Hollen to U.S. Dep't of Homeland Sec. Secretary Kristi Noem (Dec. 19, 2025), https://www.welch.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/20251219-Letter-to-Secretary-Noem-Review-Council-Follow-Up-Member-signed.pdf.

[16] *See* Oversight over the Dep't of Homeland Security, Hearing before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee, 119 Cong. (2026) (Questions for the Record from U.S. Senator Peter Welch to Secretary Kristi Noem) (on file with the Office of U.S. Senator Peter Welch).

[17] *See* Eric Bazail-Eimil, *Internal DHS Watchdog: Noem is Obstructing Our Work*, POLITICO (Mar. 4, 2026), https://www.politico.com/news/2026/03/03/dhs-noem-obstruction-00810919.

weakened our emergency management capabilities. We urge you to work with Congress and comply with PKEMRA, allowing FEMA to make its own necessary decisions to help our nation before, during, and after disasters. We are thankful for the actions you have taken so far to comply with this law.

Thank you for your consideration. We request a meeting with you to further discuss these priorities at your earliest convenience. We look forward to addressing these issues with you, just as we have in the past as colleagues in the U.S. Senate.

Sincerely,

Peter Welch
United States Senator

Andy Kim
Ranking Member,
Subcommittee on Disaster Management, District of Columbia, and Census
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

cc: Karen Evans, Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Acting Administrator
Encl.

Letter from U.S. Senator Peter Welch to U.S. Dep't of Homeland Sec. Secretary Kristi Noem (Dec. 10, 2025)
Letter from U.S. Senators Peter Welch and Chris Van Hollen to U.S. Dep't of Homeland Sec. Secretary Kristi Noem (Dec. 19, 2025)
Letter from U.S. Senators Andy Kim, Gary Peters, Peter Welch, Alex Padilla, Adam Schiff, and Chris Van Hollen to U.S. Dep't of Homeland Sec. Secretary Kristi Noem (Jan. 16, 2026)
Oversight over the Dep't of Homeland Security, Hearing before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee, 119 Cong. (2026) (Questions for the Record from U.S. Senator Peter Welch to Secretary Kristi Noem)