

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 15, 2024

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

The Honorable Deanne Criswell
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency

Dear Administrator Criswell:

Every year, Americans affected by natural disasters receive assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).¹ FEMA's mission is "helping people before, during and after disasters."² Reportedly, FEMA has approved \$1.5 billion to date in direct assistance to Hurricane Helene and Milton survivors.³ However, FEMA employees have reportedly selectively chosen who is worthy of receiving this assistance and Trump supporters don't make the cut.

Specifically, on November 8, 2024, news broke that FEMA workers instructed a team responding to hurricane survivors to avoid homes with yard signs showing support for President Trump.⁴ A FEMA supervisor messaged her team instructing about "best practices" when visiting homes to sign people up for aid. Accompanying tips like "avoid high salt diets" and "communicate and follow the rules" was an instruction to "avoid homes advertising Trump."⁵ Because of this directive, reportedly, at least 20 homes in Florida with Trump signs were not given the opportunity to qualify for FEMA assistance as workers ignored those homes. Reportedly, FEMA workers entered "Trump sign, no entry per leadership" into the incident reports for these skipped residences.⁶ This reported politically partisan selection of aid is unacceptable and contrary to FEMA's taxpayer supported mission.

¹ Usa.gov, *Financial assistance after a disaster*, (last accessed Nov. 15, 2024) <https://www.usa.gov/disaster-financial-help>.

² FEMA, *About Us*, (last accessed Nov. 15, 2024) <https://www.fema.gov/about>.

³ FEMA, *FEMA Bulletin Week of November 12, 2024*, (Nov. 12, 2024) <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDHSFEMA/bulletins/3c1730b> (showing \$1.5 billion for direct assistance and over \$1.2 billion for debris removal and emergency protective measures).

⁴ Leif Le Mahieu, *EXCLUSIVE: FEMA Official Ordered Relief Workers To Skip Houses With Trump Signs*, THE DAILY WIRE, (Nov. 8, 2024) <https://www.dailywire.com/news/exclusive-fema-official-ordered-relief-workers-to-skip-houses-with-trump-signs>.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

On November 9, 2024, FEMA announced it fired an employee, Marn'i Washington, involved in the inappropriate conduct.⁷ On November 12, 2024, Washington claimed she had been “hung out to dry” and that instructing aid workers to avoid “politically hostile” homes is “widespread FEMA policy.”⁸ More than that, she claimed the practice is “[n]ot just in the state of Florida. You will find avoidance in the Carolinas.”⁹ Reportedly, Washington also claimed “internal FEMA reports would show her decision to skip homes with political signs was part of a broader trend within FEMA to avoid potential danger to her and her colleagues.”¹⁰ To know if this claim is substantively true, especially considering FEMA’s terminating her for inappropriate conduct, FEMA must produce responsive records to Congress. An unnamed, former FEMA official reportedly “backed up Washington’s claims, telling *The [New York] Post* that the practice of skipping Trump-supporting houses is an open secret at the agency that has been going on for years.”¹¹ An animating idea behind this practice is reportedly Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) according to *The New York Post’s* ex-FEMA employee source.¹² These claims are contrary to FEMA’s statement which said, in part, “[r]ecently, one FEMA employee departed from [FEMA’s] values to advise her survivor assistance team to not go to homes with yard signs supporting President-elect Trump.”¹³ Politicization of who receives FEMA assistance is unacceptable, especially as the people affected by these disasters attempt to put their lives back together. The American people deserve a more robust and detailed explanation of this problem and FEMA’s plans to fix it.

Accordingly, so that Congress may better understand the problem and the steps FEMA plans to fix this issue, please answer the following questions no later than November 28, 2024:

1. Provide all incident reports, surveys, and other similar records mentioning “Trump,” “Republican,” “conservative,” “politics,” “MAGA,” and germane variations thereof in the last five years.

⁷ FEMA, *Statement from FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell on Employee Misconduct*, PRESS RELEASES, (Nov. 9, 2024) <https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20241109/statement-fema-administrator-deanne-criswell-employee-misconduct>.

⁸ Emily Crane, Ryan King, Jennie Taer, and Josh Christenson, *FEMA worker accused of telling staff to skip hurricane-ravaged Trump homes claims it was common practice: ‘This is not isolated’*, NEW YORK POST (Nov. 12, 2024) <https://nypost.com/2024/11/12/us-news/fema-worker-accused-of-telling-staff-to-skip-hurricane-ravaged-trump-homes-claims-it-was-common-practice-this-is-not-isolated/>.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Michael Wilner and Ana Ceballos, *Fired FEMA worker says Florida homes with Trump signs were skipped due to hostility*, MIAMI HERALD, (updated Nov. 14, 2024) <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/politics-government/article295488794.html>.

¹¹ Crane et al., *supra* note 8.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ FEMA, *Statement from FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell on Employee Misconduct*, *supra* note 7.

2. Provide all policies, guidance, and similar records related to FEMA's decision-making process in choosing homes and properties to avoid.
3. For all locations FEMA workers visited to register homes for aid, provide the recorded rationale for each one marked "not able to access property" or otherwise avoided in the last five years.
4. Provide records of communications between Washington, her team, and her supervisors referencing "Trump," "Republican," "conservative," "politics," "MAGA," and germane variations thereof.
5. Is the reported statement, "the practice of skipping Trump-supporting houses is an open secret at the agency that has been going on for years" accurate? If not, has FEMA determined whether this conduct extended beyond Ms. Washington? Provide a detailed description of FEMA's internal investigation into this matter.
6. Provide a list of every FEMA supervisor who gave, approved, or was aware of directives to avoid homes with Trump signs or otherwise identified as Republican/conservative.
7. Provide a detailed description of how FEMA will stop its employees from avoiding homes of Trump supporters and any other homes it avoided for partisan political reasons.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. Should you have any questions, please contact Jace Pimentel of my Committee staff at (202) 224-0624.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Grassley
Ranking Member
Committee on the Budget