

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 14, 2025

The Honorable Joseph V. Cuffari
Inspector General
Office of Inspector General
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
245 Murray Lane SW
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Inspector General Cuffari:

We demand that you immediately open a formal investigation into the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) catastrophic failure to respond to the devastating flooding in Central Texas over the July 4th weekend. As new details about the disaster continue to emerge, we are deeply concerned that a new Department of Homeland Security (DHS) policy adding bureaucratic red tape needlessly delayed FEMA's response to the crisis and caused preventable loss of life and suffering.¹ We owe it to the victims, their families, our constituents and the American people to understand what went wrong to prevent future failures like this from happening again.

Over the Independence Day weekend, torrential rains caused catastrophic flooding in the Guadalupe River area in Central Texas. The damage was devastating—over 120 people died and more than 170 remain missing.² Typically, FEMA prepares for an emergency like this by proactively placing personnel and resources in advance of a disaster and initiating search and rescue efforts immediately. However, reporting suggests the Administration did not take several of these steps.

Last month, it was reported that DHS Secretary Noem imposed a directive requiring that every contract, purchase or grant over \$100,000 receive her personal approval.³ When it comes to billion-dollar disasters, this new rule effectively means that nearly all funding, including lifesaving resources, must receive the Secretary's personal approval, precluding FEMA from acting as swiftly as disasters of this magnitude require. Furthermore, the rule reportedly states that Secretary Noem's office will take a minimum of five days to complete each review⁴—precious time that could determine whether Americans live or die during an emergency. Not only does this added red tape directly contradict the Administration's stated goals to cut waste and save taxpayer dollars, but it also threatens to delay critical, lifesaving work.

¹ Gabe Cohen and Michael Williams, "FEMA's Response to Texas Flood Slowed by Noem's Cost Controls," CNN, July 10, 2025. <https://www.cnn.com/2025/07/09/politics/fema-texas-flood-noem>.

² Edgar Sandoval and Pooja Salhotra, "Families Wait for Word of Missing as Texas Flood Death Toll Hits 120," New York Times, July 9, 2025. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/09/us/texas-floods-missing-search.html>).

³ 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>.

⁴ *Id.*

As a result of this misguided rule, FEMA unnecessarily delayed deployments of critical resources. For example, reports suggest that FEMA did not deploy Urban Search and Rescue teams until 72 hours after the flooding began.⁵ Even then, only 86 FEMA staffers were on the ground in Texas by Monday night,⁶ a fraction of the number of personnel required to muster an effective response. To date, response crews have only received one-week contracts, yet such operations typically require significantly more time.⁷ On top of this, Noem's policy caused FEMA to delay approval of Texas' request for aerial imagery to support its search and rescue efforts.⁸ And emerging reports suggest that nearly two days after the flooding, the agency failed to answer two-thirds of the calls to its disaster line because Secretary Noem had fired hundreds of contractors at call centers, severely hampering victims' ability to obtain assistance.⁹ All of this is unacceptable.

The American people deserve answers and more importantly, they deserve accountability. While we are still waiting for all the facts to come out, what is clear is that FEMA must be able to respond to disasters immediately, which did not happen in Texas. To that end, we demand that your office initiate a full formal investigation into FEMA's response to the Texas floods that addresses the following questions:

1. How broad is the June directive requiring Secretary Noem's approval for any purchase, contract or grant worth more than \$100,000?
2. When were the documents requesting deployment of resources prepared for Secretary Noem's approval, and how much spending and what types of resources did these documents request?
3. After such documents were prepared for Secretary Noem's review, how long did it take for her to issue a decision on these requests?
4. Of the requests she reviewed and adjudicated, which and how many did she approve or deny?
5. After Secretary Noem approved such requests, how long did it take for FEMA to deploy resources and personnel on the ground, including Urban Search and Rescue teams?
6. Did Secretary Noem's June directive lead to preventable delays and/or loss of life or property?
7. How can FEMA improve its processes in the future to ensure it can rapidly deploy resources where and when they are needed most?

Thank you for your attention to this request.

⁵ Gabe Cohen and Michael Williams, "FEMA's Response to Texas Flood Slowed by Noem's Cost Controls," CNN, July 10, 2025. <https://www.cnn.com/2025/07/09/politics/fema-texas-flood-noem>.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Brianna Sacks and Hannah Natanson, "Budget limits at DHS delayed FEMA's Texas deployment, officials say," The Washington Post, July 10, 2025. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2025/07/10/fema-texas-flooding-dhs-search-rescue/>.

⁸ Gabe Cohen and Michael Williams, "FEMA's Response to Texas Flood Slowed by Noem's Cost Controls," CNN, July 10, 2025. <https://www.cnn.com/2025/07/09/politics/fema-texas-flood-noem>.

⁹ Maxine Joselow, "FEMA Didn't Answer Thousands of Calls From Flood Survivors, Documents Show," New York Times, July 11, 2025. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/11/climate/fema-missed-calls-texas-floods.html>.

Sincerely,



Ruben Gallego
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

cc:

The Honorable Rand Paul, Chairman
Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

The Honorable Gary Peters, Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

The Honorable Josh Hawley, Chairman
Subcommittee on Disaster Management, District of Columbia, and Census

The Honorable Andy Kim, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Disaster Management, District of Columbia, and Census