

United States Senate

April 15, 2025

Cameron Hamilton
Acting Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street, SW, 8th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Acting Administrator Hamilton,

We write to urge the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to lift the freeze on FEMA grants that help improve the resiliency of public broadcasting stations. These grants — which are distributed through the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) — help reimburse stations for upgrading their emergency alert systems. For nearly two months, however, FEMA has refused to process such reimbursements, depriving local stations of promised payments and delaying critical modernization work. With hurricane season rapidly approaching, we urge to you unfreeze these payments and ensure that public broadcasters have the resources to serve their communities during emergencies.

Public broadcasters play a vital and often under-recognized role in communicating emergency alerts to the public. Many public broadcasters are designated as Primary Entry Point stations by FEMA, meaning they are the first to receive and disseminate national alerts, including messages from the president, through the U.S. Emergency Alert System.¹ These stations then relay messages to other broadcasters and cable systems, initiating a cascading chain of emergency communication. Public broadcasters also participate in the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS), which enables the delivery of authenticated alerts from federal, state, and local authorities across multiple platforms. Most notably, these stations are also often equipped with backup generators, hardened facilities, and redundant systems designed to operate during extreme conditions when other networks may fail. Public broadcasters are also essential in reaching underserved and vulnerable individuals — rural residents, the elderly, people with disabilities, and non-English speakers — providing accessible, timely, and accurate information in moments when every second counts. In an era of fragmented media, the reliability, trustworthiness, and broad accessibility of public broadcasters make them indispensable to the nation's emergency preparedness and public safety.

Despite this critical role, FEMA has recently frozen access to grants — authorized and appropriated by Congress — to improve the resiliency of public broadcaster stations. Over the past three years, Congress has provided \$136 million for FEMA through the Next Generation

¹ See, e.g., Public Media's Role in Emergency Services, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, <https://cpb.org/emergency-alerts>.

Warning System (NGWS) grant program to upgrade public broadcasting emergency alert capabilities.² CPB administers this competitive grant funding on behalf of FEMA, and in the first round of funding, CPB awarded grants to 42 entities in 23 states for nearly \$19 million — including nearly \$1.5 million for Alaska stations, over \$2 million for Louisiana stations, and nearly \$1.7 million for Tennessee stations.³ These entities then sign grant agreements with CPB, spend money to upgrade their infrastructure in line with those agreements, and seek reimbursement from FEMA through CPB. Since February 19, however, FEMA has shut off access to the payment system that processes those reimbursements, freezing nearly \$2 million in grant reimbursements.⁴ FEMA has not provided a reasonable explanation for freezing this money and has refused to turn back on the payment system — even after, in a last-resort measure, CPB sued FEMA.⁵ As of today, the grants remain frozen.

This freeze can have serious consequences for the public. Public broadcasters — who have already spent money to upgrade their infrastructure — may face financial challenges without promised reimbursements. They may have to delay or cancel projects intended to make their stations more resilient, potentially preventing them from communicating emergency alerts to the public when the next hurricane, wildfire, or winter storm strikes. To put it simply: this funding freeze is unnecessarily threatening public safety.

Given the importance of this funding, we urge FEMA to immediately reopen the payment processing system and continue processing NGWS grant reimbursements. We also request that you provide a written response to this letter by April 29, 2025 explaining FEMA's rationale for freezing the NGWS grants and providing a timeline for lifting the freeze.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,


Edward J. Markey
United States Senator


Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator

² See Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2022, Title III, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Federal Assistance § 11, Pub. L. No. 117-103 (\$40 million in fiscal year 2022); Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2023, Title III, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Federal Assistance ¶ 11, Pub. L. No. 117-328 (\$56 million in fiscal year 2023); Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2024, Pub. L. No. 118-47, Title III, Protection, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Federal Assistance, subparagraph 11 (\$40 million in fiscal year 2024).

³ See Next Generation Warning System: Impact, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, <https://cpb.org/NGWS/impact>.

⁴ See, e.g., Jonathan Stempel, *US public broadcasting entity sues FEMA over emergency alert funding freeze*, Reuters (March 13, 2025), <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-public-broadcasting-entity-sues-fema-over-emergency-alert-funding-freeze-2025-03-13>.

⁵ See *id.*