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U.S. SENATE CLIMATE CHANGE TASK FORCE

President Donald J. Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

## United States Senate

September 12, 2017

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Dear Mr. President,

As federal agencies work to meet the immediate needs of the victims of Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, we must also begin to plan for how best to rebuild in the wake of these catastrophic storms. As federal funds are used to rebuild communities impacted by these storms, I urge you to take steps so that these hard-hit communities are better protected from flooding, more severe storms and other impacts of climate change that we will see in the future.

Communities across this country are already confronting the effects of climate change, including rising flood risks resulting from stronger storms, heavier downpours and sea level rise. During the first half of 2017 (January-June), the U.S. experienced a rapid succession of disaster events, which included two flooding events and six severe storms, with losses exceeding \$1 billion dollars each. According to a November analysis by the Office of Management and Budget,<sup>1</sup> \$168 billion in federal property and assets is located in high flood risk areas, and stronger storms and sea level rise are projected to drive up annual federal disaster recovery costs along the U.S. coast by \$19 billion by 2050 and by \$50 billion by 2075. Across the North Atlantic states, cumulative costs of sea-level rise and associated flood damage may exceed \$88 billion by 2100.<sup>2</sup> We know that the impacts of climate change will only increase in the future and we should ensure that we seek to build our infrastructure to withstand these impacts.

As we begin rebuilding efforts following Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, it is essential that steps are taken to ensure that the communities devastated by these hurricanes are rebuilt smarter and stronger, and in a manner that makes best use of taxpayer dollars. Rebuilding efforts must give Americans in the impacted regions confidence that they will be better protected against devastating flooding and other climate impacts in the future, as well as reassure Americans across the country that their tax dollars are being spent sensibly.

Unfortunately, part of an Executive Order you issued last month rolled back an Obama-era directive meant to improve the climate resilience of communities and infrastructure. Your order

<sup>1</sup>[https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/omb/reports/omb\\_climate\\_change\\_fiscal\\_risk\\_report.pdf](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/omb/reports/omb_climate_change_fiscal_risk_report.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/task\\_force\\_report\\_0.pdf](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/task_force_report_0.pdf)

rescinded Executive Order 13690 issued by President Obama on January 30, 2015 that established a Federal Flood Risk Management Standard. This Flood Risk Management Standard was created by a bipartisan task force of state, local, and tribal leaders and aimed to avoid wasting taxpayer dollars on risky and poorly-sited infrastructure projects, while creating standards to ensure that hospitals, community centers, and other public infrastructure in flood-prone areas are built to withstand growing flood risks. As we now look to rebuild communities affected by Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, repealing these considerations is the wrong direction to go. I urge you to reverse this decision and require that any post-hurricane rebuilding using federal taxpayer dollars is consistent with the Federal Flood Risk Management Standard.

The Flood Risk Management Standard provided sensible flexibility by giving federal agencies three options to flood-proof new infrastructure projects. The agencies could use the best available climate change science; they could require that projects like roads and railways be built two feet above the national 100-year flood elevation standard and critical buildings like hospitals be built three feet higher; or they could require infrastructure to be built to at least the 500-year flood plain. This order only applied to federally funded projects and did not regulate private development. With Texas experiencing three 500-year floods in just the past three years, it is imperative that thoughtful and rigorous standards are incorporated into any rebuilding efforts. According to hazard mitigation experts, every dollar invested in pre-disaster resilience saves \$4 in rebuilding costs in the aftermath of a storm.<sup>3</sup>

Any federal funds used to rebuild, or significantly retrofit or repair, structures and facilities damaged by Hurricanes Harvey and Irma should ensure that this infrastructure is reconstructed to meet updated standards that will help these projects last as long as intended. It is critical that we do our best to improve the climate resiliency of our communities and infrastructure by making investments that take into account science and the impacts of climate change that we are already seeing and those that we will continue to see in the future.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey  
U.S. Senator

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nibs.org/?page=mmc>