

**Statement for the Record
by the
The BuildStrong Coalition
for the
The Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency
Management**

**Hearing on
“FEMA Priorities for 2022 and the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan.”**

Tuesday, April 5, 2022, at 10:00 AM

Thank you for the opportunity for the BuildStrong Coalition to submit a statement for the record for the Subcommittee’s hearing, “*FEMA Priorities for 2022 and the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan*” focusing on the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) priorities for the upcoming year as well as for the strategic plan years 2022-2026. Chairman Titus and Ranking Member Webster are to be commended for leading the subcommittee in prioritizing the need for disaster mitigation and resilience investments as a core component of the national conversation on resilient infrastructure and communities. This committee’s leadership on the Resilient Assistance Mitigation for Environmentally Resilient Infrastructure and Construction by Americans (AMERICA) Act (H.R.5689), which overwhelmingly passed the House by a vote of 383-41 on April 5, 2022, was a major step in having this much-needed legislation enacted into law. This significant piece of legislation will facilitate historical resources and incentives to help American communities invest in cost-effective, risk reducing disaster mitigation efforts that will help make our nation more resilient. Smart investments in lifeline infrastructure and community resilience are the best way to address the threat of worsening disasters. The BuildStrong Coalition is honored to continue our role to drive the focus on laws, policies, and programs that aid in the creation of a disaster resilient nation. We remain ready to continue this work and are prepared to serve as a resource to advance your commitment to enhancing our country’s resilience profile.

The BuildStrong Coalition, formed in 2011 to respond to an increasing number of severe disasters, is made up of a diverse group of members representing firefighters, emergency responders, emergency managers, insurers, engineers, architects, contractors, and manufacturers, as well as consumer organizations, code specialists, and many others committed to building a more disaster resilient nation. The BuildStrong Coalition has been a partner with Congress’s work to investigate causes of, and devise the solutions to, the rising costs and impacts of disasters in the U.S. over the past decade. We have been honored to present witnesses and participants in hearings, roundtables, and briefings to identify opportunities for policy changes that promote mitigation and the smart investment of federal resources to address our country’s increasing number of severe and costly weather events, including informing several key provisions of this Subcommittee’s Disaster Recovery Reform Act of 2018 (DRRA) (P.L. 115-254) and we will continue to work with your colleagues in the Senate on the Resilient AMERICA Act to ensure its passage into law.

In our statement for the previous hearing on stakeholder perspectives held in February, we outlined critical policy recommendations and principles that are supported by data and science that should be included in FEMA’s community resilience priorities for the year. These priorities included: securing more resources for mitigation, increasing the resiliency of the

nation's lifeline infrastructure, including power and electric grids, facilitating the creation of resilient homes and communities through strong building codes, easing the administrative burden of the BRIC program, and increasing technical resources and building the capacity and capability to identify risks. The BuildStrong Coalition was delighted to hear the FEMA Administrator emphasize the importance of these priorities throughout her testimony.

Relevant to the committee's April 5 hearing, we'd like to highlight some of these key priorities:

Driving Resilient Homes and Communities through Strong Building Codes

Individuals and communities are kept safe in times of disasters through the strength of their homes. This is particularly prevalent as we learn lessons from COVID-19 and begin to understand how to increase resilience to wildfires. Disaster-resilient and sustainable construction and the use of stronger building codes have been proven to save lives, reduce the damage of natural disasters, and protect the environment. Unfortunately, only a handful of states have adopted the most modern building codes, and many lack the resources to adequately implement codes. To help correct this paradigm at the federal level involves creating incentives that encourage state and local governments to adopt modern building codes, while simultaneously equipping communities with the tools and resources needed to carry out meaningful enforcement regimes. Through the BRIC program, some states without a statewide adoption of building codes have a hard time being competitive for funding to do code development or code enforcement projects when having a statewide building code is part of the funding point scoring system and in line with the intent of Congress and DRRA.

The President's 2023 Budget Request for FEMA includes a request for "funding and personnel to continue the implementation of a Federal and National Building Codes Strategy to advance the adoption of disaster-resistant building codes at the State and local level." This will place a Building Codes Specialist in every Region to better work with State, Local, Tribal, and Territory (SLTT) and other external partners. The BuildStrong Coalition is supportive of a Federal and National Building Codes Strategy and would like to see FEMA work closer with external partners to explore ways to utilize volunteers and/or nonprofits to offer ways to provide additional technical assistance and building code enforcement resources to communities, specifically more vulnerable communities.

It is important to note that the Resilient AMERICA Act would assist FEMA in their strategic priority of increasing building code adoption and assist with the Federal and National Building Codes Strategy. If passed into law, Resilient AMERICA would set aside no less than 10% in BRIC (Stafford Sec. 203) to fund the adoption and enforcement of the latest consensus-based building codes and standards. Eligible activities will also include training of code-enforcement officials. The adoption and enforcement of the latest building codes is one of the most impactful steps in bolstering community resilience.

Easing Administrative Burdens for the BRIC Program and Increasing Technical Resources

The BuildStrong Coalition was also pleased to hear Administrator Criswell address a consistent criticism of the BRIC program that we have heard repeatedly: that its dollars are going to wealthier areas with better access to resources to pay for tools like consultants and technical

information/capabilities to build out application packets that are, naturally, more competitive. Theoretically, localities that are most in need of funding for mitigation are largely those that do not have the reserves to spend on outside resources for applications.

FEMA currently provides BRIC technical assistance for up to twenty low-income communities.¹ We were delighted to hear that FEMA is working to increase the number of communities that technical assistance is being provided. The BuildStrong Coalition will continue to monitor how FEMA is addressing this concern and we will continue to explore ways that we can offer increased technical assistance to their stakeholders.

The BuildStrong Coalition and its members stand ready to partner with the committee as it drives mitigation and resilience against disaster and climate impacts. The compelling arguments for these policy changes are grounded in overwhelming science and evidence. We are excited to join congressional leaders like you as we identify opportunities for policy changes that promote disaster resilience and the smart investment of federal resources to address our country's vulnerable infrastructure and the increasing number of severe and costly weather events. Together, we can help save the lives and homes of our citizens.

¹ [BRIC Direct Technical Assistance \(fema.gov\)](https://www.fema.gov/bric-direct-technical-assistance)