

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 11, 2025

Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Laura Grimm
Chief of Staff, performing the duties of
Undersecretary for Commerce of Oceans and
Atmosphere and Administrator, National Oceanic
and Atmospheric Administration
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20230

Lieutenant General William H. Graham Jr.
Commanding General and 56th Chief of
Engineers
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
441 G St NW
Washington DC, 20314

Dear Mr. President, Ms. Grimm, and General Graham:

We write with deep concern about the recent flooding in Kerr County, Texas, by both the severity of this event and the structural shortcomings at the federal, state, and local levels that contributed to the tragic loss of life. On July 4, 2025, Kerr County was struck by a flash flood of devastating impact. The Guadalupe River rose by more than 20 feet in less than two hours,¹ engulfing homes and campsites, and leaving over a hundred dead in its wake.² This tragedy echoes a troubling national pattern of accelerating flash flood disasters that have claimed lives: 46 lives in the greater New York City area in September 2021,³ 45 lives in Kentucky in July 2022, 20 lives in Tennessee in August 2021, and 250 lives across the Southeast in September 2024.⁴ These events are not anomalies—they are harbingers of a climate-disrupted future.

Atmospheric scientists have long warned that warmer air holds more water vapor and thus latent energy produces heavier rainfall. In 1989, the Director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, James Hansen, wrote presciently that "the greenhouse effect enhances both ends of the hydrologic cycle..., there is an increased frequency of extreme wet situations, as well as increased drought. Model results are shown to imply that increased greenhouse warming will lead to more intense thunderstorms, that is, deeper thunderstorms with greater rainfall."⁵

¹ Houston Chronicle, "A 'raging torrent': Guadalupe River swelled 20 feet in 95 minutes, sensor data shows," Dug Begley and Alexandra Kanik, July 6, 2025, <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/texas/article/guadalupe-river-flooding-warning-system-gauges-20574405.php>.

² PBS News, "Death toll surpasses 100 from catastrophic Texas flooding," Vertuno et al. July 7, 2025 <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/death-toll-surpasses-100-from-catastrophic-texas-flooding>.

³ New York Times, "New York storm updates As Ida Deaths Rise, N.Y. Leaders Look Toward Future Storms," May 24, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/09/03/nyregion/nyc-flooding-ida>.

⁴ AP News, "A look at some of the deadliest floods in the US in the last 25 years," Adrian Sainz, July 6, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/flood-deaths-flash-flooding-weather-408b11abe0389f38c93d8722b9d15dd0>.

⁵ Goddard Institute for Space Studies, "Regional greenhouse climate effects," Hansen et al., 1989, <https://www.giss.nasa.gov/pubs/abs/ha05700m.html>.

While the National Weather Service (NWS) forecast may have been accurate, accurate weather forecasts are not enough. It is imperative that these warnings are adequately communicated to members of the public and in a way that prompts the appropriate lifesaving action by emergency managers, first responders, and the public at-large. We are concerned that there seems to have been a breakdown at this stage starting with the first flash flood watches issued on Thursday afternoon.

Following a series of catastrophic tornadoes in the spring of 2011 that culminated in the worst tornado in a generation in Joplin, Missouri, NWS acknowledged that accurate forecasts were not enough to protect life and property, and thereby elevated the importance of properly communicating to the public about life-threatening weather events. As a result, NWS developed the Weather Ready Nation initiative to ensure that Americans knew how to appropriately respond to dangerous weather conditions when alerted by NWS or the private weather enterprise. In support of this effort, Congress codified the position of Warning Coordination Meteorologist in every weather forecast office (WFO) around the country in the 2017 Weather Act.

While staffing across NWS has long been a bipartisan concern, the staffing reductions mandated by the Department of Government Efficiency has greatly magnified the issue, with NWS losing nearly 15% of its staff nationwide since January. The forecast accuracy and timeliness during this event in Texas was a testament to the dedication of the local NWS staff who flexed their schedules to ensure adequate coverage during such a high-impact event. That is not a sustainable solution, nor is it reliable enough for the increasing incidence of dangerous weather events.

In particular, the loss of the Warning Coordination Meteorologist at the San Antonio weather forecast office (WFO) and the reduced number of forecasters put the people of Texas at risk. Lacking a full staff complement requires the team to focus only on issuing the forecasts and warnings. Outreach and coordination, a key responsibility of the Warning Coordination Meteorologist, do not occur. Also, we understand that the funding supporting travel to the community for outreach and coordination, including meeting with emergency managers and elected officials, has been suspended. Having the Warning Coordination Meteorologist position and the vacancies filled may have been critical to saving more lives by connecting with as many local community leaders as possible in the hours between the 1 a.m. NWS warning and 4 a.m. when the most dangerous conditions began impacting residents.⁶

Given these concerns, we intend to work quickly to enact the Weather Staffing Improvement Act, which will streamline the hiring of federal weather forecasters. Meanwhile, we request that NWS expedite the backfilling of vacancies at all WFOs and the National Centers for Environmental Prediction. Further, we request that, despite proposed cuts to programs in the fiscal year 2026 budget request, no other reductions in funding or staffing occur without the explicit direction of Congress to programs that support precipitation prediction and decision support or the improvement of those services, including, but not limited to the work of the Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research.

NWS Director Ken Graham has also laid out strategic priorities to transform NWS' staffing models and organizational effectiveness, known as "Ken's 10".⁷ We applaud his thoughtful proposals, though we urge

⁶ New York Times, "As Floods Hit, Key Roles Were Vacant at Weather Service Offices in Texas," Christopher Flavelle, July 5, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/05/us/politics/texas-floods-warnings-vacancies.html?smid=url-share>.

⁷ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, "NWS Priorities & Action Strategies for the Future — 'Ken's 10,'" February 21, 2025, <https://www.noaa.gov/NWStransformation>.

NOAA to provide more detailed information for Congress to consider prior to wholesale implementation. Further, we urge that any adoption and implementation be done in a measured way so as to prevent any failures in the current system during the transition.

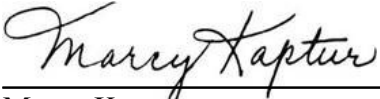
We ask that your agencies please provide the following information:

1. **Staffing Cuts:** Provide a breakdown of NWS staffing levels since 2017 at WFOs and the National Centers for Environmental Protection. Identify how many WFOs, and for how long each, has lacked each of the following positions over that time: Meteorologist in Charge, a Science Operations Officer, and a Warning Coordination Meteorologist? What performance impacts have resulted?
2. **Communication Gaps:** How did the absence of a Warning Coordination Meteorologist and reduced staffing affect warning distribution, communication and coordination in Kerr County and other nearby jurisdictions? What is the standard operating procedure for such a role in such critical weather events?
3. **Precipitation Prediction:** Atlas-15 will provide detailed estimates of maximum probable precipitation rates for any location in the U.S., critical information for planning for severe weather events. Please explain any reasons for the current delays in Atlas-15's national release. Are sufficient funds available for the completion of this tool? Have any funds been redirected away from this purpose?
4. **Status of PPGC:** The Precipitation Prediction Grand Challenge (PPGC), an initiative to dramatically improve the accuracy of forecasting when, where, and how much precipitation will occur has been chronically underfunded. Please provide an update on the current efforts to date and the requirements to make significant progress over the next 5 years.
5. **Adopting Graham's Priorities:** Which of Ken Graham's ten transformation proposals have been implemented? Provide projected costs and timelines.
6. **Corps Flood Control Improvements:** This event also highlights the need for improvements from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) who is tasked with flood control across the country. How has the Corps updated its standard operating procedures to recognize the increased risk of extreme precipitation? What is the status of the adoption of the Forecast-Informed Reservoir Operations (FIRO) to reduce flooding risk and maximize water availability? What additional research and monitoring is necessary, and on what timeline, to incorporate FIRO into the Corps' standard procedures?
7. **Interagency Collaboration:** What NOAA and Corps coordination mechanisms are in place to improve rural flood-warning infrastructure and emergency preparedness, including hydrology modeling and flood response planning?
8. **Future Preparedness Plan:** Describe plans to adapt federal weather services to the growing frequency of extreme precipitation events attributable to climate change.

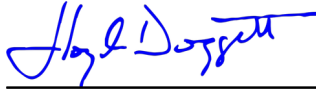
Across America, we are entering a perilous new era of extreme precipitation. The science is clear: a warming world means heavier rains, more frequent flash floods, and rising stakes. Failure to learn from this disaster will only exacerbate future risk. Now is the moment to prioritize investments—restoring NOAA staffing and accelerating research and coordinating flood preparedness across the Federal Government. We respectfully ask for your prompt attention and response within 30 days to ensure federal

weather infrastructure is not the weak link in our national resilience. We further request a quick response to the July 8, 2025 letter from Rep. Doggett, the Dean of the Texas Congressional Delegation.

Sincerely,



Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress



Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress



Eric Sorensen
Member of Congress