

June 8, 2018

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Thune  
Chairman  
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce,  
Science, and Transportation  
512 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Nelson  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce,  
Science, and Transportation  
512 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ron Johnson  
Chairman  
U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security  
and Governmental Affairs  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Claire McCaskill  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security  
and Governmental Affairs  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Chairman Thune, Ranking Member Nelson, Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member McCaskill:

As the Senate considers legislation to reauthorize the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the undersigned organizations urge you to include language from the House-passed FAA Reauthorization Act (H.R. 4) that will make our nation's communities, people and infrastructure better prepared and more resilient to the impacts of natural disasters and other catastrophic events. In particular, we support:

- Certain provisions of Title VI—Disaster Recovery Reform Act, which amends the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5121)
- Title IX—Preparedness and Risk Management for Extreme Weather Patterns Assuring Resilience and Effectiveness Act of 2018 (PREPARE Act of 2018)

The undersigned groups represent a wide array of interests and also recognize the importance of cross-cutting, holistic solutions to mitigate and prevent the worst possible effects from disasters. We have come together to express our support for this legislation with the shared goals of reducing the economic, environmental and social costs of disasters that trigger federal emergency response and helping people and communities take action to recognize hazards and minimize their impact.

### **The Disaster Recovery Reform Act (DRRA)**

First, we would like to express our appreciation to Congress for including resources for emergency disaster relief in the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 that will enable more resilient rebuilding of damaged or destroyed infrastructure in the aftermath of the 2017 hurricanes and use of mitigation measures to better withstand

future storms. A critical shortcoming of our current disaster response system is the extent to which damaged or destroyed infrastructure is rebuilt to pre-disaster conditions rather than made more resilient. By updating the Stafford Act to allow FEMA funds to support rebuilding to the latest consensus-based codes and standards, Congress has an opportunity to expand this important precedent and enable more individuals and communities to rebuild in a more resilient manner.

While federal emergency funding will still be needed to help individuals and communities recover from disasters, a central purpose of the DRRRA is to prevent or reduce fatalities, injuries and damage to public infrastructure and private property. Just as FEMA is doing now in its own strategic planning, the DRRRA would shift more attention and federal resources to pre-disaster mitigation. Investment in mitigation, both pre- and post-disaster, is the best defense against natural disasters and will ultimately reduce future federal spending for disaster recovery. A 2017 report for FEMA by the National Institute of Building Sciences documents the return on investment: Federal mitigation grants can save the nation, on average, \$6 in future disaster costs for every \$1 spent on hazard mitigation.

As the Senate considers disaster recovery reform, we support the inclusion of provisions that promote the following pre- and post-disaster mitigation strategies:

- **Adopting and effectively implementing current model building codes.** An Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety study after Hurricane Charley in 2004 found that Florida building code upgrades and enforcement following the 1992 Hurricane Andrew reduced the frequency of property damage by 60 percent and the severity of damage by 42 percent. A FEMA analysis from 2014 estimated approximately \$500 million in annualized loss avoided in eight southeastern states due to the adoption of modern building codes. Strong building codes save lives and protect property.
- **Utilizing green infrastructure and natural defenses.** Low-impact development strategies like permeable pavement, rainwater catchment and vegetated rooftops reduce storm water runoff. For places prone to severe flooding, innovative solutions are being developed that combine grey and green infrastructure. Nature-based mitigation strategies such as wetlands serve as storm buffers and barriers. A study conducted by the Gund Institute for Environment (The University of Vermont) found that wetlands and floodplains protected Middlebury, Vermont from as much as \$1.8 million in flood damages during Tropical Storm Irene in 2011 and saved the town an average of \$450,000 each year through flood mitigation.
- **Avoiding new development in high-risk areas.** However, existing communities in high-risk areas should be made more resilient to disasters, especially flooding.

**In addition, we support a mechanism (a set-aside or additional resources) to ensure dedicated funding for sustained, long-term pre-disaster hazard mitigation for national public infrastructure.** Public and assisted housing, schools, hospitals and other buildings; airports; the electric grid; water treatment facilities; transportation and communication systems are all critical infrastructure. We also support efforts to restore wetlands and other natural infrastructure that protect coastlines and communities.

With enhanced resources for pre-disaster mitigation and by allowing FEMA funds to be used to “build back stronger” after disasters, the DRRRA takes a huge step toward helping communities be better prepared for future disasters and “bounce forward” to greater self-reliance, resilience and quality of life.

## **The PREPARE Act**

We also support the PREPARE Act (Title IX of H.R. 4), which seeks to improve federal agency coordination on preparedness and support for regional, state, and local activity to assess vulnerabilities and cost effective

resilience strategies. This no-cost legislation was crafted as a bipartisan response to GAO's High Risk List, which cites extreme weather as a fiscal threat to the federal government. Again, we encourage federal agencies to consider proven strategies and tools available to support preparedness and resilience, including, but not limited to, green infrastructure; high-performing buildings (reflecting the latest codes and relevant systems and certifications); water facilities; distributed energy resources including energy efficiency, on-site renewable energy, microgrids and energy storage; rural broadband access; and multi-modal, resilient transportation.

The deterioration of our nation's infrastructure is well documented in the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) 2017 Infrastructure Report Card, but the impacts of extreme weather events are a grave reminder of the need to implement solutions as soon as possible. The Atlantic hurricane season officially started June 1, but major storms have already caused deadly flooding in many states. We have the materials, technologies and know-how to make our infrastructure more resilient to earthquakes, strong winds, wildfires, flooding, grid outages and other hazards. Now we need the will to set priorities for upfront investment that will save lives and money in the future. Enhancing the resilience of our nation's infrastructure for the benefit of all communities will pay dividends for years to come.

We stand ready to be a resource to you and your colleagues and look forward to continuing to work on a bipartisan basis to promote cost effective policy solutions such as DRRRA and the PREPARE Act.

If you have any questions, please contact Ellen Vaughan at the Environmental and Energy Study Institute (EESI), who will coordinate with the appropriate organization(s): [evaughan@eesi.org](mailto:evaughan@eesi.org), 202-662-1893. EESI is an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan policy-education organization that promotes sustainable energy and resilient development.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy  
American Public Works Association  
American Society of Landscape Architects  
Association of State Floodplain Managers  
Business Council for Sustainable Energy  
Environmental and Energy Study Institute  
EPDM Roofing Association  
Green Business Certification Inc.  
Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety  
International Association of Emergency Managers  
International Code Council  
National Association of Regional Councils  
National Association of State Energy Officials  
National Emergency Managers Association  
National League of Cities  
National Recreation and Park Association  
Polyisocyanurate Insulation Manufacturers Association  
The Pew Charitable Trusts  
U.S. Green Building Council