

**GREG STANTON**  
ARIZONA'S FOURTH DISTRICT

**WASHINGTON OFFICE**  
207 CANNON BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515  
(202) 225-9888

**DISTRICT OFFICE**  
1220 S. ALMA SCHOOL ROAD, STE. 209  
MESA, ARIZONA 85210  
(602) 956-2463

STANTON.HOUSE.GOV



**Congress of the United States**  
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WESTERN HEMISPHERE SUBCOMMITTEE

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE STRATEGIC  
COMPETITION BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES  
AND THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY**

April 27, 2026

Todd Lyons  
Acting Director  
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement  
500 12<sup>th</sup> Street SW,  
Washington, D.C. 20001

Acting Director Lyons,

As Ranking Member of the Subcommittee with jurisdiction over the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), I am initiating an investigation into the reported use of FEMA personnel and resources in support of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) immigration enforcement activities directed by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). These reports raise significant concerns about violations of the statutory protections enacted by Congress after Hurricane Katrina and FEMA's readiness to fulfill its core mission of helping Americans before, during, and after disasters.

Following FEMA's widely documented failures during Hurricane Katrina, Congress conducted an extensive review of the agency's structure and authorities.<sup>1</sup> That review concluded that when FEMA was placed within DHS after the September 11 attacks, too much operational control over FEMA had been consolidated under the DHS Secretary. Congress determined that this contributed to FEMA's inability to maintain independence, readiness, and mission clarity required for effective disaster response.<sup>2</sup>

To correct these systemic weaknesses, Congress enacted the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act (PKEMRA), which established critical safeguards to ensure FEMA

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<sup>1</sup> Sage Journals. *Congress and Katrina: A Failure of Oversight*. December 2007. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0160323X0703900103>

<sup>2</sup> Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina. *A Failure of Initiative*. February 16, 2006. Available at: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CRPT-109hrpt377/pdf/CRPT-109hrpt377.pdf>

could operate independently within DHS and remain focused on its core mission.<sup>3</sup> Among its key provisions, PKEMRA:

- Prohibits the Secretary from taking any action, including reorganization, transfer of functions, or budgetary changes, that would “substantially or significantly reduce the authorities, responsibilities, or functions of [FEMA] or the capability of the Agency to perform those missions.<sup>4</sup>”
- Requires FEMA to remain a distinct entity within DHS, explicitly exempting it from the Secretary’s general reorganization authority.<sup>5</sup>
- Provides the FEMA Administrator with dual reporting lines, including direct reporting to the President during major disasters, to preserve operational autonomy and ensure FEMA’s disaster response capabilities cannot be subordinated to unrelated departmental priorities.<sup>6</sup>

I am concerned that DHS’s reported use of FEMA personnel to support immigration enforcement activities may violate these statutory protections and compromise FEMA’s ability to fulfill its mission.

In an open letter to Congress, FEMA whistleblowers warned that PKEMRA’s safeguards are being disregarded in several significant ways.<sup>7</sup> According to their account, FEMA employees have been detailed or reassigned to ICE at a time when FEMA is already operating at reduced capacity due to widespread staff departures through deferred resignations and voluntary retirements. Whistleblowers further reported that employees who decline reassignment to ICE have been threatened with termination. They also described severe workforce erosion caused by hiring freezes, the cancellation of critical support contracts, and programs that incentivized employees to leave federal service. As a result, one-third of FEMA’s full-time staff reportedly departed the agency in a single year, leading to the loss of institutional knowledge and long-standing operational relationships essential to FEMA’s mission.<sup>8</sup>

Additional reporting reinforces these concerns. In August, it was reported that approximately 100 FEMA human resources employees were reassigned to ICE to assist with recruitment efforts and support ICE’s stated goal of hiring 10,000 new agents.<sup>9</sup> In March 2026, civilian employees at

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<sup>3</sup> GAO. Actions Taken to Implement the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006. November 21, 2008. Available at: <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-09-59r>

<sup>4</sup> 6 U.S.C § 313

<sup>5</sup> Id.

<sup>6</sup> Id.

<sup>7</sup> Katrina Declaration and Petition to Congress. August 25, 2025. Available at: <https://www.standupforscience.net/fema-katrina-declaration>

<sup>8</sup> Id.

<sup>9</sup> Washington Post. Dozens of FEMA Staffers Involuntarily Reassigned to Support Deportations. August 6, 2025. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2025/08/06/fema-ice-mass-deportations-dhs/> ;

the Department of Defense received a notice soliciting volunteers for an ICE detail, directing interested employees to apply through FEMA.<sup>10</sup> These actions indicate that FEMA personnel and resources are being redirected to support immigration enforcement activities rather than FEMA's core mission of disaster preparedness and response.

Taken together, these allegations suggest that FEMA's disaster response capabilities may have been significantly weakened by directives requiring FEMA personnel to support activities outside the agency's statutory mission. If accurate, these actions could constitute violations of PKEMRA and undermine the nation's preparedness for catastrophic disasters.

To fulfill my oversight responsibilities, I request answers to the following questions and the production of the following data and documents by May 11, 2026:

1. Please describe in detail how FEMA has supported ICE missions over the past two years. In your response, include the number of FEMA personnel involved, the specific missions they supported, and the operational or recruitment goals their participation helped ICE achieve.
2. How long have FEMA personnel detailed to ICE remained on assignment? Please provide the duration of each detail, the roles performed, and whether any details were extended beyond their original terms.
3. Have FEMA employees continued supporting ICE missions during lapses in appropriations? If so, please identify the authorities under which they continued working and the nature of the duties performed during those periods.
4. Where did the directive to use FEMA personnel for immigration enforcement activities originate? Please identify the DHS office or official who issued or authorized the directive, and provide any related guidance, memoranda, or communications.
5. Have any FEMA employees deployed in the field alongside ICE agents? If yes, please describe the nature of these deployments, the duties performed, and the legal authorities under which they occurred.
6. Is ICE collaborating with FEMA on the construction, planning, or operation of warehouse facilities intended to house migrants or store ICE equipment? If so, please provide details on the scope of FEMA's involvement, including personnel, funding, or logistical support.
7. Has any funding been transferred or reprogrammed from FEMA to ICE to support immigration enforcement activities? Please identify the amounts, the accounts involved, the legal authorities cited, and the purposes for which the funds were used.

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Reuters. Trump Administration Shifts FEMA Staff to ICE During Hurricane Season. August 6, 2025. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2025/08/06/fema-ice-mass-deportations-dhs/>

<sup>10</sup> Message obtained by the Subcommittee, sent from Timothy D. Dill, Assistant Secretary of War to Department of War Civilian Employees. Copy available upon request.

The Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, under House Rule X, has jurisdiction over multiple DHS mission areas—including the Coast Guard and federal management of emergencies and natural disasters.

I look forward to your prompt response. If you have any questions, please contact Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Democratic staff at (202) 226-8776.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Greg Stanton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Greg Stanton  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Public Buildings,  
Economic Development, and  
Emergency Management