The Federal Emergency Management Agency's Response to COVID-19 and Other Challenges

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STATEMENT

OF

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

BEFORE

THE

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

HOMELAND SECURITY SUBCOMMITTEE

UNITED STATES SENATE

WASHINGTON, D.C.

"The Federal Emergency Management Agency's Response to COVID-19 and Other Challenges"

Submitted

By

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Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Capito, and Members of the Subcommittee, my name is
Robert Fenton. I am the Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Federal Emergency
Management Agency (FEMA) Administrator. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss FEMA's
role in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is an unprecedented challenge that has
claimed the lives of over 558,000 of our friends, relatives, and neighbors across America, caused
grave damage to the global economy, and put a spotlight on inequities throughout our nation.

At FEMA, we are committed to advancing access and equity in the COVID-19 vaccination
program. This is our highest priority and its success is dependent upon the whole community
being unified to achieve this goal. To accomplish this, we are executing the President's National
Strategy for the COVID-19 Response and Pandemic Preparedness with the help

of our federal,
state, local, tribal, and territorial partners.

As of April 12, 2021, 189.6 million vaccine doses have been administered across the United
States with over 172 million of those taking place since President Biden was inaugurated.
Furthermore, under the President's leadership, the Administration began providing states and
territories with a new dashboard depicting allocation projections with a three-week forecast. As
of early April, this weekly allocation stood at approximately 26.8 million doses, and over the last
three weeks, close to 90 million total doses have been sent to states, tribes, and territories
through federal channels.

For today's hearing, I would like to discuss what we are doing to respond to the COVID-19
pandemic, what we plan to do in the coming months, and what challenges lie ahead. Our current
work can be grouped into three broad categories.

First, at the President's direction, FEMA is reimbursing 100 percent of the cost for Title 32
National Guard activations, as well as 100 percent of eligible emergency protective measure
expenses incurred by states, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) partners, and certain private non-
profits, through September 30, 2021. This includes reimbursement for vaccination efforts,
screening and testing, personal protective equipment, and emergency medical care. The President
also directed FEMA to expand emergency protective measure eligibility from January 21, 2021
through September 30, 2021, to include the safe opening and operation of public facilities,
including schools, child-care facilities, healthcare facilities, non-congregate

shelters, domestic violence shelters, and transit systems impacted by COVID-19. FEMA is coordinating with federal partners to finalize the specific eligibility criteria for this expanded assistance.

Second, FEMA is working to support SLTT-led Community Vaccination Centers (CVCs) through the deployment of federal clinical and non-clinical personnel; the provision of equipment, supplies, and technical assistance; and the awarding of expedited financial assistance to states, tribes, and territories. We are also providing Mobile Vaccination Units (MVUs), which, when paired with staff and supplies, can each support administration of 250 or more vaccines per day. For example, our team worked closely with Connecticut to utilize an MVU to support jurisdictions in providing COVID-19 vaccinations to all those who want one. As a testament to the importance of public-private partnerships in delivering vaccinations, staffing for the MVU will be provided by UConn Health, Griffin Health, Hartford Healthcare, and Trinity Health of New England. The sites will also be supported by the Connecticut National Guard and municipal partners for non-clinical staffing. Federally supported MVUs are currently operating in 17 states. FEMA MVU's are currently operating in Connecticut, Maryland, Oregon, and Nevada to bring vaccinations to hard-to-reach and high-risk populations.

Third, FEMA teamed up with the Department of Defense and other agencies to establish CVC sites. These sites are stood up in partnership with state and local authorities who are working side by side with faith-based and community organizations to better reach underserved and

historically marginalized communities, which have a high risk of COVID-19 exposure and infection. The sites are selected based on analysis of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Social Vulnerability Index and other Census data as well as input from our partners. These CVC sites come with an additional temporary, eight-week vaccine allocation that is above and beyond the normal state allocation and the largest of these sites can administer up to 6,000 vaccines a day. CVC Pilot sites are operating in California, New York, Texas, Florida, Pennsylvania, Georgia, North Carolina, Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, New Jersey, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, Tennessee, Virginia, and Washington with several more expected to be operational in the near future.

As of April 12, FEMA has obligated more than $4.53 billion for COVID-19 vaccination efforts. Since January 20, 2021, FEMA has supported 1,567 federally supported vaccination sites, including 357 mobile units. FEMA currently has 2,602 staff deployed across the nation to support vaccination missions. To further support this whole-of-government effort, Secretary Mayorkas activated the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Surge Capacity Force for vaccination support operations, drawing on federal employees from DHS Components and other federal agencies to augment FEMA's workforce.

President Biden has made equity a cornerstone of his Administration's COVID-19 efforts, and at FEMA we established a Civil Rights Advisory Group (CRAG) within the National Response Coordination Center to ensure that equity is incorporated into all activities. The CRAG is led by

FEMA's Office of Equal Rights and includes personnel from the Department of Health and Human Services, the CDC, the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division, and the Department of Homeland Security's Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, among others.

Since January 29, 2021, FEMA's Office of Equal Rights and its federal partners have supported the development of the methodology used to determine federally-led CVC pilot site selections, and has worked on the ground in all ten FEMA regions to collect and analyze demographic data, identify underserved communities, and collaborate with community-based organizations. We have also incorporated Regional Disability Integration Specialists into the CRAG to ensure that the needs of people with disabilities are integrated in all facets of vaccine center operations. As of early April, approximately 58 percent of all vaccine doses administered at the federal pilot CVCs went to communities of color.

While FEMA remains focused on supporting vaccination distribution efforts and the COVID-19 response, the agency also maintains its mission readiness and ongoing support for multiple emergency and disaster declarations. Recent examples include the severe winter storms that caused widespread damage in Oklahoma, Louisiana, and particularly Texas. FEMA actively coordinated with impacted state, local, and tribal governments to address unmet needs and support the distribution of critical resources such as generators, fuel, blankets, water, and meals. Following Texas's major disaster declaration and approval for Individual Assistance, FEMA continues to assist eligible individuals and households in Texas who have

uninsured or
underinsured expenses for serious disaster-related damages.

As we look ahead to the late spring and early summer, FEMA has a particular interest in
ensuring that COVID-19 vaccines reach as many people as possible before we enter hurricane
and wildfire seasons. Climate change is making natural disasters more frequent, more intense,
and more destructive, and we must be prepared for another challenging series of disaster events
this summer and fall. Last year, FEMA faced a record-setting number of hurricanes and major
wildfires. While the agency responded successfully to each of these natural disasters, COVID-19
makes any response and recovery effort more difficult. Widespread vaccination is essential to
improving our posture to respond to natural disasters.

We have reason to be hopeful in the months ahead. As vaccine supplies continue to increase
substantially in the months to come, FEMA will continue to work with our federal and SLTT
partners to ensure that vaccinations can proceed as quickly as those increased supplies allow, so
that every member of the public who wants a vaccine will have access to one. We are also
working to amplify messaging from the Ad Council, which is coordinating with federal partners
to encourage vaccination for individuals who may be hesitant to get vaccinated.

We greatly appreciate this Subcommittee's steadfast support for FEMA's efforts throughout the
COVID-19 pandemic and for providing the resources our agency has needed to meet these
historic mission requirements. I would like to thank Congress for recently appropriating $50
billion to FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund within the American Rescue Plan Act of

2021 to cover
the costs associated with major disaster declarations, including the ongoing battle against
COVID-19.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify. I look forward to answering your questions.