

The Honorable Sam Graves
Chairman

The Honorable Rick Larsen
Ranking Member

Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

August 29, 2025

Dear Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen:

The following 27 organizations, representing the members and partners of the Appalachian Flood Policy Coalition, write to thank the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure for your work on the bipartisan Fixing Emergency Management for Americans (FEMA) Act (HR 4699). We appreciate many provisions in the bill that will help hardworking communities across Appalachia who are increasingly vulnerable to extreme rainfall. Over the last decade thousands of families have been impacted by federally declared flooding disasters across central Appalachia, including by Hurricane Helene in September 2024 in western North Carolina and flooding across Kentucky, Virginia and West Virginia in February and April 2025. These events stymie long-term economic development by continuing to hit communities still rebuilding after the last “record breaking” flood.

Our coalition has spoken with numerous stakeholders across the region to develop a [platform](#) of commonsense, pragmatic solutions to pervasive concerns. As extreme weather continues across the region, Appalachian communities would benefit from many of the provisions included in the FEMA Act of 2025, including:

- Simplifying the process of accessing assistance through a Universal Disaster Application.
- Supporting low-income households by making it easier for individuals without a fixed address to access post-disaster housing assistance; lengthening the amount of time FEMA can assist disaster-impacted households; preventing survivors from living in unsafe housing conditions; and increasing transparency for decisions regarding assistance eligibility.
- Transitioning from a reimbursement-based model to a grant-based model for FEMA Public Assistance, with improvements to streamline grant distribution and reporting while allowing for more flexible use. These changes would speed delivery of support and reduce stress on rural and under-resourced communities.
- Efforts to make FEMA’s debris removal process more responsible and efficient.
- Creation of a public assistance dashboard. Increased transparency and visibility into assistance applications and approvals, project updates, cost estimates, and other data on the impact of disaster and the status of disaster recovery would streamline services and ease the burden on disaster survivors.

Our communities need these commonsense improvements that will reduce overall federal spending while increasing protections of lives and local economies. As the bill progresses, we encourage the Committee to further strengthen and improve the bill, including by:

- Strengthening and providing additional clarity on the bill’s revised pre-disaster mitigation planning processes, by adding more requirements around transparency and reporting, and ensuring projects are held to consistent standards to guarantee cost-effectiveness and resilient design.

- Reserving some pre-disaster dollars for a regular national competition focused on promoting and fostering innovation and best practices, and increasing incentives for nature-based risk reduction approaches with mitigation funds.
- Making permanent private road and bridge repair to restore residential access an allowable use of FEMA Public Assistance funding. There is a bipartisan proposal in Congress, H.R. 760, *Restoring Access to Mountain Homes Act*, that would make this change to public assistance eligibility, but only for the counties in Western North Carolina impacted by Hurricane Helene in 2024. From years of organizing Appalachian communities following flood disasters, we know this is a pervasive rural issue that impacts the entire region. Making a permanent change to FEMA's public assistance program would provide significant support to rural communities doing costly repairs to restore residential access to emergency services.
- Eliminating or reducing Public Assistance matching requirements for economically distressed communities, which would better enable communities throughout Appalachia to prepare for and respond to disasters. For towns operating on annual budgets of a couple hundred thousand dollars, having to put up tens of thousands of dollars for non-federal match requirements isn't about "having skin in the game" to repair their public infrastructure, it is a monumental challenge that limits access to Public Assistance.
- Provide FEMA money to more quickly repair homes occupied by renters, especially in rural areas or in areas with limited housing stock.
- Include language that would make Disaster Case Managers available sooner after a disaster and extend the period of performance to 36 months.
- To ensure that the implementation of these policies best benefits Appalachian workers, all construction work or other work done to implement these policy priorities should include requirements for prevailing wages with strong protections for worker safety, use of registered apprenticeship programs and prioritize local hiring. When applicable, the materials and parts should be procured locally or regionally.

With mounting extreme weather and abandoned mines contributing to devastating floods, Appalachia is at serious risk of further flood disasters. Our federal policy platform offers a path to improve many of the community concerns with disaster recovery that have burdened our communities in repeated flood disasters over the past years.

Thank you again for your work on this bill. We look forward to working with the Transportation & Infrastructure Committee to continue to strengthen this bill as it progresses.

Sincerely,

Appalachian Citizens Law Center

Appalachian Voices

ReImagine Appalachia

350.org

Action Together NEPA

Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy

Between the Waters

Chesapeake Climate Action Network Action Fund

Christians For The Mountains

Clean Fairfax (VA)

Coal River Mountain Watch (WV)

Concerned Health Professionals of Pennsylvania

Disability Law United

Eastern Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation (EPCAMR)

Energy Efficient West Virginia

FreshWater Accountability Project (OH)

Kentucky Waterways Alliance

Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network (LiKEN)

Mid-Ohio Valley Climate Action (WV)

Mountain Association (KY)

National Wildlife Federation

Ohio River Valley Institute

PennFuture

Robert Zeigler, Millheim Borough Council Vice President, Millheim, Centre County, PA

Three Rivers Waterkeeper (PA)

Visibility Outreach Touch Engage South Arkansas (VOTE SoAR)

West Virginia Rivers Coalition