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Dear Senator:

On behalf of the Pew Charitable Trusts' flood-prepared communities program, I am writing to urge your support for the disaster recovery reform provisions contained in Division D of H.R. 302. Speedy passage of this package of amendments will allow all levels of government to improve the response to and preparation for natural disasters.

Although Congress has amended the Stafford Act multiple times to allow for disaster recovery spending to include certain pre-disaster mitigation efforts, much of the nation's disaster spending still involves rebuilding projects that fail to protect communities from future natural hazards. H.R. 302 addresses this long-enduring problem with a strong emphasis on pre-disaster preparation. In particular, the bill makes three key improvements in disaster policy:

- H.R. 302 allows for a set-aside of disaster monies into a National Public Infrastructure Predisaster Mitigation Fund that can be awarded on a competitive basis for cost-effective pre-disaster mitigation projects.

In the past, relatively small amounts of assistance have been made available for the types of preventative projects that can reduce loss of life and property associated with natural disasters, and vulnerable communities have encountered difficulty and delays in securing funding for needed protection projects. Sec. 1234 addresses this need by allowing an amount equal to as much as 6 percent of certain spending related to each presidentially declared disaster to be placed into this fund. While actual funding would be subject to the availability of funds within the broader Disaster Relief Fund, this provision has the potential to significantly increase the investment in important projects to elevate homes and public buildings, improve stormwater management, buy out repeatedly-flooded structures, build safe rooms, storm-proof utilities, or otherwise prepare for hurricanes, storms, and other hazards.

- H.R. 302 creates incentives for communities to adopt and enforce building codes and requirements that incorporate up-to-date hazard-resistant designs.

Following multiple disasters, teams of architects, structural engineers, and other experts have analyzed the nature and extent of damages to determine the types of design and construction practices that are most effective in sparing lives and property. Disaster losses have been lessened as these findings have been incorporated into the latest iterations of codes and standards that govern new construction or major reconstruction. Nonetheless, there are hazard-prone communities that have yet to adopt

updated, life-saving code improvements. H.R. 302 addresses these gaps by allowing for disaster assistance funding to help communities with adoption and enforcement of improved building codes and standards (Sec. 1206). It also allows FEMA, in awarding competitive grants, to consider a potential grantee's commitment to adopting and enforcing hazard-resistant codes (Sec. 1234).

- H.R. 302 removes the financial disincentive for communities to rebuild facilities in less disaster-prone settings.

The Disaster Relief Fund is an important source of financial assistance for repair and reconstruction of flood-damaged buildings, such as fire stations, schools, or hospitals. In some cases, however, the value of such spending is short-lived, as the same facility is hit by storm after storm. While the Stafford Act currently recognizes that a more prudent and cost-effective approach may be to relocate and fully rebuild a vulnerable building, it biases against the build-back-stronger approach by cutting the percentage of federal assistance allowed for such projects. Sec. 1207 removes this bias and creates funding parity for alternative rebuilding approaches.

Beyond these three key changes, H.R. 302 makes other important improvements to disaster policy, including directing the Federal Highway Administration to develop guidance on the repair, restoration, and replacement of inundated and submerged roads damaged or destroyed by a major disaster (Sec. 1228); directing FEMA to develop definitions for resiliency for the rebuilding of damaged structures (Sec. 1235); and calling on FEMA to provide guidance and training that will better enable local and state governments as well as first responders and utilities to prioritize response to critical facilities, including hospitals, nursing homes, and other long-term care facilities (Sec. 1208).

The Pew Charitable Trusts believes that, overall, Division D of H.R. 302 will help communities across the country to better prepare for, respond to, recover from, and mitigate against disasters. We urge you to support the legislation.

Thank you for your consideration, and please feel free to contact me at gbrown@pewtrusts.org or Velma Smith at vsmith@pewtrusts.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Geoffrey Brown".

Geoffrey Brown
Director, Government Relations
The Pew Charitable Trusts