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STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

Submitted to the House of Representatives Committee on

**Science, Space
And
Technology**

**Subcommittee on Research and Technology
Subcommittee on Environment**

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**Calm Before the Storm: Reauthorizing the National Windstorm Impact Reduction
Program**

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Thank you, Chairwoman Stevens and Chairwoman Fletcher, and distinguished members of the Committee for the opportunity to sit before you today.

I am honored to testify on behalf of Kansas as the Adjutant General and Director of Kansas Division of Emergency Management and Kansas Homeland Security.

MITIGATION EFFORTS IN KANSAS

A 2018 study by the National Institute of Building Sciences¹ found that mitigation can save \$6 in future disaster cost for every \$1 spent. Kansas saves more money, on average, than any other state using federal Hazard Mitigation Assistance, as reported by a recent Pew Charitable Trusts study². The data analysis showed that Kansas avoided \$6.81 in potential disaster recovery costs for every \$1 spent. This return on investment is attributed to the emphasis placed on reducing impacts from the two greatest hazards in Kansas: flooding and windstorms.

With limited resources to contribute to disaster loss reduction, Kansas invests predominately in the mitigation of flooding and windstorms. To date, Kansas has implemented approximately \$220 million in mitigation projects, netting an estimated \$1.5 billion in disaster cost avoidance. Over the past two decades, Kansas has experienced 37 federally declared presidential disasters with over 90% of them consisting of windstorm damages. With funding primarily received through the post-disaster Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, Kansas has completed 235 tornado safe rooms with nearly 95% of those installed in schools.

The largest cost burden of mitigation within Kansas is by local governments. The successful completion of the aforementioned school safe rooms was greatly influenced by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and Qualified School Construction Bond Program which supported the financing of tornado safe rooms in Kansas schools.

PLANNING AND COLLABORATION

Kansas approaches all-hazard emergency management planning with a whole-community approach. Leading mitigation efforts within Kansas is the Kansas Hazard Mitigation Team consisting of local, state, and federal partners that provide input into the states mitigation program, plans and investment strategies. The use of the Kansas Hazard Mitigation Team promotes collaboration of varying mitigation programs through all levels of government. This collaborative approach initiated the development and successful implementation of regional mitigation plans. Twelve regional mitigation plans enable 105 counties to successfully apply for and use federal mitigation assistance to reduce loss. This planning approach has been identified by Federal Emergency Management Agency as a best practice due to effectiveness and cost efficiency.

Our whole-community planning approach is vital to understanding and addressing program mitigation challenges. Kansas is a home rule state and, as such, the responsibility for adoption

¹ <https://www.nibs.org/page/mitigationsaves>

² <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2019/06/17/data-highlight-state-by-state-benefits-of-federal-natural-disaster-mitigation-grants>

and enforcement of building codes lies with local jurisdictions. Several city and county jurisdictions, mostly urban communities, have adopted the International Residential Code and the International Building Code. However there are numerous rural jurisdictions within Kansas without an adopted building code. The education and promotion of code adoption remains an ongoing mitigation effort within Kansas which is why community involvement is of the utmost importance.

Collaboration with other state governments is common and often involves the sharing of program initiatives and best practices. Our regional mitigation planning approach has been explored by other state programs. Kansas is currently examining the implementation of a residential safe room program similar to Oklahoma. This program would provide rebates for Kansas residents to install qualified safe rooms on private property, further improving the state's windstorm resilience.

Collaboration with the federal government is primarily through FEMA, which supports all-hazard emergency management preparedness, mitigation, and recovery. Funding provided by the Emergency Management Grant Program is critical to supporting the Kansas Emergency Management Program and disaster preparedness initiatives. Additionally, our mitigation program is completely reliant on FEMA Hazard Mitigation Assistance funding. Besides supporting emergency management through funding of preparedness activities and cost-shared recovery, FEMA provides assistance largely in the form of planning technical assistance, training, response resources, and post-disaster assessments. FEMA's Hazus program is a notable technical assistance tool that provides a model for estimating potential losses from earthquakes and floods increasing hazard awareness and planning. However, the absence of a tornado-centric model creates a significant planning gap that hinders risk-informed windstorm decisions within Kansas.

Several federal agencies support emergency management efforts within Kansas including the United States Corps of Engineers and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration among others. NOAA and the National Weather Service support the forecasting and warning of severe weather and serve as an emergency support function partner within the State Emergency Operations Center. The National Weather Service is instrumental in our program's preparedness and response to natural disasters.

CONCLUSION

The successful implementation of cost-effective mitigation within Kansas is based on local government involvement, federal funding assistance, and prioritizing projects focused on mitigating against the state's greatest hazards of flooding and windstorms. Efforts undertaken by the National Windstorm Impact Reduction Office support our program mitigation approach by allowing data-informed decision making, ultimately improving Kansas resilience. Building code research performed to date has been successful in reducing impacts of windstorms within Kansas. However, there remains the need to examine ways to improve the implementation of this research within communities. The Kansas program will remain committed to reducing disaster loss and are comforted that the federal government continues support of these efforts.

Thank you again for the opportunity, and I look forward to your questions.