May 9, 2025

U.S. House of Representatives
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
The Honorable Mark Amodei, Chair
The Honorable Lauren Underwood, Ranking Member

FY 2026 Written Testimony for the Hearing Record

Dear Chair Amodei and Ranking Member Underwood:

The American Institute of Architects (AIA) represents over 100,000 architects and design professionals. For nearly 170 years, AIA has been committed to safeguarding the public's health, safety, and welfare, and to the improvement of our nation's quality of life through the built environment. Central to that mission is ensuring that buildings are designed and constructed with resilience in mind—so they can withstand evolving threats, adapt to changing conditions, and continue to serve and protect American communities for generations to come.

AIA respectfully submits the following recommendations for appropriations in the FY 2026 Homeland Security for your consideration.

$900 million for Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC)
BRIC (Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities) provides grants to help states, local communities, tribes, and territories proactively invest in infrastructure projects that reduce the risks from natural disasters. It supports initiatives like strengthening bridges, improving drainage systems, and wildfire mitigation.

On April 4, FEMA announced the end of the BRIC program. This decision by the administration has the potential to devastate communities impacted by national disasters. BRIC funding goes directly to states for specific projects; the abrupt cancelation has paused or eliminated projects in process.

For example, in Virginia, Richmond stands to lose nearly $12 million for upgrades to its water treatment facility—vital after a recent failure disrupted service across the region. Portsmouth could lose over $24 million for improvements to the Lake Meade Dam, which supplies drinking water to Hampton Roads and is at risk during heavy rains. This sudden loss threatens to delay essential resilience projects and leaves vulnerable communities more exposed to future disasters.

In Florida, dozens of projects in communities that are especially vulnerable to flooding and other natural disasters are also at risk. Two major Infrastructure projects in St. Petersburg to storm-harden sewage lift station across the city and to install backflow preventers and a pumpstation in one of the lowest lying and flood prone neighborhoods, could impact millions of people. Back-flow preventors are designed to keep sea, storm, and wastewater from overwhelming drainage systems during high tides and heavy rains.

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North Dakota's impacts include the loss of a water intake project and wastewater treatment plants in two cities. While these projects hadn't broken ground yet, local agencies have already incurred costs for planning and reviews, leaving communities scrambling for alternative funding to move forward.

Restarting and extending BRIC funding will help communities across the country. Many projects are underway and stopping mid-way is wasteful and harmful. The projects save lives, reduce the cost of post-disaster recovery, and protect critical infrastructure—cutting it would mean leaving communities more vulnerable and paying far more in disaster response later.

$715 million for FEMA's Flood Mitigation Grants

FEMA's flood mitigation grants provide critical support to communities by funding projects that reduce or eliminate the risk of flood damage to homes and infrastructure. These grants help homeowners, local governments, and organizations invest in long-term solutions like property elevations, floodproofing, and the buyout of repetitive loss properties. In areas where flooding is frequent and costly, these initiatives can make the difference between continuous disaster cycles and long-term stability.

In the past years, FEMA funded projects specifically designed to help people survive and rebuild after floods including elevating flood-prone structures, enhancing storm drainage systems, and implementing measures to protect homes and residents from 100-year storm events—storms with a 1% chance of occurring in any given year. These grants are helping communities take vital steps toward protecting lives, property, and local economies from future flood events. As extreme weather becomes more common, flood mitigation grants serve as a model for smart, sustainable disaster risk reduction. FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) saves the nation approximately $1.7 billion annually in flood losses.

$233 million for FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grants

FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program provides funding to states, local governments, tribes, and territories to support long-term hazard mitigation measures after a major disaster. The goal is to reduce the risk of loss of life and property from future natural disasters by investing in projects like home elevations, floodproofing, infrastructure retrofits, and property acquisitions. These grants are a crucial part of building more resilient communities and minimizing the financial, economic, and emotional toll of disasters over time. The

In 1980, there were three disasters that cost approximately $45.6 billion. The cost for the 27 disasters last year has been over $180 billion so far[1]. According to a study from the National Institute of Building Sciences (NIBS), the savings-to-spending ratio for mitigation funding is as much as 13:1 and 6:1 specifically for federal funding[2]. Beyond the property costs, designing buildings to exceed select building code requirements, could prevent 600 deaths, one million nonfatal injuries and 4,000 cases of PTSD, whilst stimulating upwards of 86,000 new, long-term jobs. The need for proactive investment in sound mitigation strategies has never been greater.

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[1] NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI) *U.S. Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters* (2025).

[2] National Institute of Building Sciences (NIBS) The Natural Hazard Mitigation Saves: 2019 Report (2019).

A clear example of HMGP's effectiveness comes from the aftermath of Hurricane Irma in 2017. FEMA's funding helped Florida's Lee Memorial Hospital repair critical infrastructure, including its elevator system. When Hurricane Ian struck in 2022, that elevator continued to operate while others failed, ensuring that hospital operations and patient care could continue uninterrupted. FEMA has also conducted numerous studies on the effectiveness and value of flood and hurricane wind mitigation projects around the country. One case study analyzes the impact of improvements to 64 buildings in Broward County, Florida resulting in $10,398,664 of loss avoidance and a 483 percent return on investment.

These grants not only support recovery but also lay the foundation for long-term safety, economic resilience, and cost savings. As natural disasters grow more intense, investments like these are essential to safeguarding lives, local and rural economies, and the future stability of communities across the country.

AIA urges continued and increased funding for federal resilience and mitigation programs to protect communities, infrastructure, economies, and lives from future natural disasters.

Discontinuing or underfunding these essential programs threatens public safety and increases future disaster recovery costs. Congress must act now to restore and bolster funding, ensuring our communities are stronger, safer, and better prepared for weather events and other natural disasters.

Thanks for the opportunity to testify.