



April 27, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Russell Senate Office Building, 317  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Hart Senate Office Building, 322  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
United States House of Representatives  
U.S. Capitol Building, H-1236  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
U.S. Capitol Building, H-2468  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

In the coming weeks and months, the strain of the coronavirus (COVID-19) on the nation's economy and healthcare systems is likely to be compounded by active spring flood and hurricane seasons.<sup>1,2</sup> Historically, such events have disrupted livelihoods, closed businesses and cost billions of dollars in recovery – a devastation we simply cannot afford, either in terms of dollars spent or lives at risk.<sup>3</sup> That is why The Pew Charitable Trusts urges Congress to make investments in flood mitigation programs a priority, so that communities have the resources to better withstand natural disasters as they protect themselves from and recover from the pandemic.

Creating new opportunities for states and localities to reduce their risk *before* disaster strikes would protect families and businesses, reduce the potential of exacerbating impacts from pandemics like COVID-19, create jobs for shovel-ready mitigation projects, reduce disaster disruptions to small businesses and supply chains, and help stem ballooning disasters costs.

Pew recommends that Congress include the following pre-disaster mitigation measures in the next appropriate legislative vehicle.

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<sup>1</sup> National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, *2020 U.S Spring Outlook*, Climate Prediction Center <https://www.noaa.gov/media-release/us-spring-outlook-forecasts-another-year-of-widespread-river-flooding>.

<sup>2</sup> Colorado State University, *Extended Range Forecast of Atlantic Seasonal Hurricane Activity and Landfall Strike Probability for 2020*, <https://tropical.colostate.edu/media/sites/111/2020/04/2020-04.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, *Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters: Events*, National Centers for Environmental Information, (accessed April 2, 2020), <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/events/>.

*Authorize and Fund a State Flood Mitigation Revolving Loan Fund*

One proposal that would create self-sustaining pre-disaster funding for localities has been introduced by Senators Jack Reed (D-RI), John Kennedy (R-LA), and Bob Menendez (D-NJ) as the State Flood Mitigation Revolving Loan Fund Act of 2019 (S. 2192). Companion legislation, (H.R. 1610) has been introduced in the House by Representatives Charlie Crist (D-FL) and Roger Williams (R-TX). This approach would establish a revolving loan fund to provide low-interest loans and selected grants to help communities, businesses, schools, and families prepare for floods. Adopting concepts like this can provide flexible and sustainable funding mechanisms for states and localities to better plan for and address growing risk to increasingly extreme weather.

*Establish a Pre-Disaster Infrastructure Program for Transportation*

Investing in pre-disaster mitigation could help improve the safety and resiliency of the nation's roads and bridges. Since 2000, the Emergency Relief (ER) Program within the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has received more than \$16.5 billion to help repair or restore damaged highway assets. The ER program, however, currently has no requirements to incentivize or prioritize investments that guard against future disasters. Pew recommends that Congress authorize the FHWA to create a pre-disaster infrastructure competitive grant program to address vulnerable or repeatedly damaged roadways. Such a program could be incorporated into the ER program itself or operate separately.

*Adopt Resilience Provisions within the America's Transportation Infrastructure Act of 2019*

Pew recommends adopting the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee-passed provisions of the America's Transportation Infrastructure Act of 2019 (S.2302) that would provide nearly one billion dollars in annual funding over five years to states and communities for assessments, planning, and projects related to improving the ability of transportation assets to withstand disasters. Allocated through a combination of formula-based funding and competitive grants, these landmark provisions would help build and upgrade transportation infrastructure in ways that incorporate future risks, prioritize nature-based solutions, and allow communities to maintain community access to critical facilities during disasters.

On behalf of The Pew Charitable Trusts, thank you for your work to respond to the pandemic and for your consideration of forward-looking measures that can protect Americans from additional hardships in the future.

Sincerely,



Laura Lightbody  
Director, Flood-prepared Communities  
[llightbody@pewtrusts.org](mailto:llightbody@pewtrusts.org)

Cc:

Representative Nita M. Lowey, Chairwoman, House Appropriations Committee  
Representative Kay Granger, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Committee  
Senator Richard C. Shelby, Chairman, Senate Appropriations Committee  
Senator Patrick J. Leahy, Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Committee  
Representative Peter A. DeFazio, Chairman, House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee  
Representative Sam Graves, Ranking Member, House Transportation and Infrastructure  
Committee  
Senator John Barrasso, Chairman, Senate Environment and Public Works Committee  
Senator Thomas R. Carper, Ranking Member, Senate Environment and Public Works Committee  
Representative Maxine Waters, Chairwoman, House Financial Services Committee  
Representative Patrick T. McHenry, Ranking Member, House Financial Services Committee  
Senator Michael D. Crapo, Chairman, Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee  
Senator Sherrod Brown, Ranking Member, Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs  
Committee