

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 13, 2025

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

Cameron Hamilton
Acting Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Acting Administrator Hamilton:

I write to you today to express my grave concerns regarding reports that Hurricane Helene survivors' assistance checks from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) have been cashed by individuals who have stolen these survivors' identities. Defrauding victims of a catastrophic disaster like Hurricane Helene is one of the most disgusting crimes imaginable, and you must do everything in your power to investigate these claims and to rectify the situation to the best of your ability.

Recent reporting indicates that at least five flood victims have had their FEMA assistance checks stolen and cashed. These claims, spanning Unicoi, Johnson, Carter, and Washington Counties in Tennessee, are only the instances that we are aware of, but there are undoubtedly more victims of these horrific crimes. Survivors indicate that, when they contacted FEMA, the customer service was abhorrent, with one survivor describing their treatment as a "nightmare."¹ According to these disaster survivors, the call wait times and the bureaucracy at the agency were entirely unacceptable.

One survivor relayed this concern to FEMA in October and—six months later—still has not received a reissue payment. When made aware of the fact that the check had been cashed fraudulently, FEMA told the survivor that the matter was out of the agency's hands and that they should contact the Treasury Department.²

This level of bureaucracy and needless red tape must end. Following reports that FEMA employees under the Biden administration refused to offer assistance to survivors who expressed support for President Trump, confidence in FEMA is at an all-time low. At a time when assistance checks necessary for Tennesseans to rebuild their lives are being stolen and they cannot rely on FEMA to help, the American people have clearly lost all faith in FEMA as an institution. I am grateful to Secretary Noem for her work to root out bad actors at FEMA, and it is well past time for you to take corrective actions to restore the American people's confidence in your agency.

¹ Karen Jenkins, *More Area Flood Victims Say Their FEMA Checks Have Been Stolen*, WJHL (March 10, 2025), <https://www.wjhl.com/news/local/more-area-flood-victims-say-their-fema-checks-have-been-stolen/>.

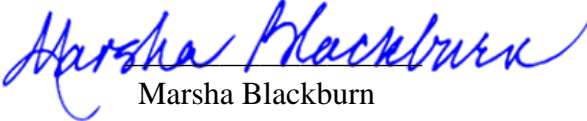
² *Id.*

With that in mind, we ask that you respond to the following questions by March 19, 2025:

1. How many reports of stolen assistance checks has FEMA received?
2. Is FEMA actively cooperating with federal, state, and local law enforcement to investigate these crimes and bring the perpetrators to justice?
3. Is FEMA coordinating with the Treasury Department regarding the reports of stolen and fraudulently cashed assistance checks?
4. How many requests for reissue payments has FEMA received? What is the status of each of those requests?
5. What is the average wait time to speak to a customer service representative?
6. What processes and procedures are employees require to follow with customers who raise issues with their FEMA assistance?

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator