November 18, 2019

The Honorable Kathy Castor
Chair
House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis
U.S. House of Representatives
2052 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Garret Graves
Ranking Member
House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis
U.S. House of Representatives
2402 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Castor and Ranking Member Graves,

On behalf of the National League of Cities (NLC), we appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback to the Select Committee on the Climate Crisis on policies Congress can adopt to mitigate the impacts of climate change, support local adaptation efforts, and build community resilience.

Thank you for your leadership on these issues and your willingness to work in a bipartisan manner to address this urgent issue that impacts communities, residents, businesses and the economy every day.

Cities across the United States are seeing the effects of climate change and are taking action to mitigate impacts on their residents and businesses. Extreme weather events, such as heat waves, droughts, wildland fires, heavy downpours, floods, and hurricanes, which have become more frequent and more severe, have brought renewed attention to the need to anticipate, prepare for and adapt to these events—across all levels of government. These extreme weather events cost local, state and federal governments trillions of dollars and severely impact local and regional infrastructure, the economy, public safety, public health, natural landscapes, environmental quality and national security.

Local leaders are taking action on climate change because as first responders, local governments are on the front lines of delivering services and protecting citizens. Local elected officials are entrusted with the stewardship of taxpayer dollars and
know that the cost of prevention pales in comparison to the cost of inaction — in terms of dollars, property and human life. Moreover, improving energy efficiency and investing in renewable energy makes good economic sense for residents, businesses and communities.

While cities are prepared to forge ahead on these initiatives and actions, we urge the federal government to be a partner in these efforts in support of our economy and to build resilient communities. Importantly, federal policies should not preempt state or local authority to enact policy options that differ from federal choices or to enact stricter or strong measures within their jurisdictions. Additionally, federal policies should not hinder or negate local action. Local leaders share a common goal with federal leaders – to create a strong and safe nation. As intergovernmental partners, leaders across all levels of government must work together.

**Climate Change Mitigation, Adaptation and Resilience Policy Recommendations**

In order to meet the carbon emissions reductions goals necessary to help mitigate the effects of climate change on communities, improving energy efficiency, increasing energy conservation and deploying renewable energy systems will be essential at the local, state and federal levels. These actions will save taxpayer dollars, boost the national and local economy, enhance national security, increase our nation’s energy independence, and improve environmental quality.

The federal government must develop policies to rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to prevent the worsening of the already measurable effects of climate change on the global environment. NLC urges the federal government to develop a multi-pollutant strategy to reduce emissions from power plants, mobile sources and other major sources to provide significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Moreover, climate change is a global problem that demands a global solution. As such, NLC supports the U.S.’s reengagement in the Paris Climate Agreement.

Additionally, NLC urges the federal government to support local climate mitigation efforts by passing legislation that will:

- Reauthorize and fully fund the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant;
- Incentivize energy efficiency and conservation improvements in residential and commercial buildings, schools and federal buildings;
- Establish a national renewable portfolio standard;
- Provide a long-term extension of the investment and production tax credits for renewable energy;
- Support and promote transportation alternatives, including public transportation and multi-modal transportation systems, to reduce carbon emissions from mobile sources and provide congestion relief;
- Offer incentives for acquisition of zero- or low-emission vehicles and for the installation of related infrastructure; and
- Strengthen fuel economy standards.

A successful national climate protection strategy must also focus on implementing adaptation measures that are necessary to prepare cities and residents for those changes that may be unavoidable. The range of adaptation issues must be uniquely addressed by each local government.

In order to help communities plan for the impacts of a changing climate and create resilient communities that can adapt in the face of challenges and changing circumstances, NLC urges the federal government to:

- Comprehensively study the effects of climate change on the nation’s cities, as well as different regional climate change impacts, and identify solutions to address current and future threats;
- Provide financial and technical assistance to support local government vulnerability assessments and climate change mitigation and adaptation implementation efforts;
- Ensure that local governments have the information, resources and tools to adequately plan for and respond to climate change;
- Establish a national climate service to communicate changes and impacts, and provide critical time-sensitive information to local governments and the public, as well as long-term climate change information;
- Facilitate collaboration among federal, state and local authorities to share best practices and climate resilient strategies;
- Fund a national public service campaign to inform the public about the impacts of climate change and the need for adaptation measures;
- Invest in and incentivize green infrastructure, including parks and water reuse/conservation efforts;
- Provide customized tools, strategies and technical assistance to assist communities in integrating risks of climate change and extreme weather events into emergency management planning;
- Fully fund grant programs that help local governments prepare, respond and recover from climate change and extreme weather events, such as pre-disaster mitigation and hazard mitigation grants.

The federal government also has a role to play in strengthening our nation’s infrastructure to withstand extreme weather events. NLC calls on the federal government to pass legislation that will:

- Reduce the vulnerability of federal programs to the impacts of climate change and extreme weather;
• Better align federal funding with local preparedness and resilience efforts;
• Require consideration of climate-related risks and vulnerabilities as part of all federal policies, practices, investments, and regulatory and other programs;
• Develop an incentive-based disaster insurance and mitigation system that would encourage property owner to retrofit existing structures to reduce future losses from natural disasters; and
• Provide incentives to lending institutions to incorporate flood mitigation provisions as conditions for home and business loans.

Attached is NLC’s Statement for the Record on “Assessing FEMA’s Readiness for Future Disasters” from earlier this year. This document provides additional information on federal policies and programs to strengthen mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery from extreme weather event.

Additionally, NLC’s resolutions on climate mitigation, adaptation and resilience will be up for approval by the membership this week at our annual City Summit conference. We will be pleased to forward you a copy of the final resolutions.

In closing, thank you for considering the perspective of local elected officials as you move forward. NLC looks forward to working with you and Congressional leaders to develop a national strategy to address climate change. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact NLC staff Carolyn Berndt, Legislative Director for Sustainability at 202-626-3101 or berndt@nlc.org.

Sincerely,

Clarence E. Anthony  
CEO and Executive Director
National League of Cities (NLC) would like to thank Chairman Thompson and Ranking Member Rogers for the opportunity to submit the following statement for the record on assessing the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) readiness for future disasters.

NLC is the voice of America’s cities, towns and villages, representing more than 200 million people. NLC works to strengthen local leadership, influence federal policy and drive innovative solutions.

Understanding the Current Reality

The increasing threats related to climate change include, but are not limited to, sea-level rise, extreme weather events, such as heat waves, wildfires, droughts, floods, heavy precipitation and strong storms, pest infestations, and disease, all of which can threaten human health, cause damage to local infrastructure, jeopardize water quality and availability, and lead to energy and food shortages. The breadth and severity of these threats require the assistance and resources of the federal government.

The Fourth National Climate Assessment reports that climate change impacts are affecting every state and region. The changing climate has exponentially increased the likelihood that cities, towns and villages will experience a catastrophic extreme weather event in the near future. Therefore, NLC calls on the federal government to take urgent action to mitigate the effects of climate change and to support adaptation and resilience efforts to prepare communities for a changing climate and extreme weather events.

Local governments are first responders. Local leaders are charged with protecting the health, safety and welfare of residents. When it comes to extreme weather events, local leaders prepare in advance of emergency situations, offer immediate assistance to those impacted, and identify strategies, solutions and partnerships to address situations quickly and efficiently.

The lives lost, property damaged, and economic hardships suffered due to the increasing number of natural disasters pose severe problems for individual residents and businesses in cities, towns and villages across the country. Local governments are the first level of government to respond to and
manage most disasters and emergencies and must be regarded as the focal point of all disaster mitigation and recovery activities.

NLC appreciates the enormous task FEMA has in helping so many communities that have been devastated by the recent natural disasters. We are very concerned that the threat of future disasters is not going to diminish, but rather increase, which will put additional strain on the ability of FEMA to quickly provide federal assistance to local governments in their recovery efforts.

While ensuring FEMA’s ability to help local governments respond to and quickly recover from disasters must remain the highest priority, NLC strongly urges the federal government to change the way our nation sets its federal investment priorities. Resilience and sustainability of critical lifelines and services to communities should be a top priority to help protect communities from future disasters. Building infrastructure to withstand future devastation caused by climate change will not only save taxpayers money, it will ensure communities and their economies will recover quickly after a disaster.

**NLC’s is Working to Make Cities Resilient**

Now in its third year, NLC is working to help cities implement policies and programs to make their communities more resilient and sustainable. Through its Leadership in Community Resilience program, NLC provides a $10,000 grant and at least 12 months of technical assistance, staff support, and professional development opportunities for community leaders to make their communities more resilient. NLC has established technical assistance partnerships with the Thriving Earth Exchange and ecoAmerica, which provide additional tools and resources to support the cohort of cities.

In addition to providing direct assistance to cities, the program gathers new insights related to the challenges and opportunities associated with local resilience initiatives. NLC is sharing the lessons learned with cities throughout the United States.

The 2019 cities that are participating in the program are Anchorage, AK; Park City, UT; Denton, TX; Durham, NC; Evanston, IL; Roeland Park, KS; Ann Arbor, MI; and Jersey City, NJ.

- With NLC’s support, Anchorage aims to include local entrepreneurs and other well-networked community leaders in the disaster and climate resilience conversation. These leaders and business owners can serve as valuable nodes in their respective communities and networks, reaching limited English proficiency residents more easily and quickly in the event of an emergency. With a rise in extreme heat events, wildfires, coastal flooding and the ever-present possibility of earthquakes, Anchorage is eager to establish effective communication strategies between the municipality and all its diverse communities so that newcomers and long-time residents alike can be well prepared.

- Modeled on a program developed by neighboring Summit County, Park City plans to pilot a series of community events and workshops to educate and engage the community on the use of biochar as a forest management and carbon sequestration tool. The city has already engaged a range of partners to move this project forward, including a cross-departmental group comprised of Park City Emergency Management, the Forestry Advisory Board, Fire District, and Forest Manager, as well as the Lone Peak Hotshots (an inter-agency crew of state and federal wildfire experts), the city’s two ski resorts and other businesses and land conservancies. With NLC’s
support, Park City hopes their pilot project can become a salable model for other western cities facing similar climate risks.

- With NLC’s support, the city of Denton will hold a series of engagement events to inform and activate residents on local resiliency issues, and likewise, solicit feedback from all of its diverse communities on the Climate Action Plan; leverage its relationship with local universities and student bodies; and use the input gathered from residents and other stakeholders to shape the city’s future climate policies.

- With support from NLC, Durham hopes to educate its municipal staff on the co-benefits of solar and storage and critical infrastructure, and engage in a region-wide, peer-to-peer learning workshop where the city and other solar communities can activate a broader metropolitan movement towards resilience through solar deployment.

- NLC is supporting Evanston in its effort to expand this experiential learning activity to include more communities, partner with museums throughout the region and add content for two additional environmental issues: the connection between air quality and climate change, and zero waste. The goal is to create an activity that can be much more easily and independently set up for multiple events and expanded so that community organizations can run the activity without the aid of city staff. The city of Evanston is eager to engage all members of the community in its climate action plan—particularly those who have been historically underrepresented in planning processes — so that they can make more informed decisions and ultimately, co-create viable solutions with the city.

- With NLC’s support, Roeland Park will inaugurate an annual summit for regional practitioners and local elected leaders in September of this year to elevate the importance of metro climate action in the Kansas City area. Modeled after the Southeast Florida Climate Change Compact’s annual leadership summit as well as other regional collaborative efforts, Roeland Park leaders and their partners hope to attract and engage a variety of interested parties and highlight key topics at each convening.

- NLC is working with Ann Arbor to compile climate projections for variables such as data on heat waves, seasonal changes, extreme precipitation and extreme temperatures leading up to 2050, 2075 and 2100. The city is also working with climate demographers to develop population projections that include growth due to climate migration. The city plans to train and engage all city staff on how to use the compiled data and projections in their Capital Improvement Plan application process, and to understand which additional climate and weather variables the city should be aware of when designing capital projects.

- NLC is working with Jersey City to hold eight community workshops and planning sessions over the course of the year and, simultaneously, and solicit feedback from a variety of community-based organizations and businesses to independently evaluate the city’s emergency and preparedness plans. In a region with an increasing likelihood of storms and coastal flooding, Jersey City strives to help residents feel safe and prepared to withstand the dangers of these events and ensure the city can take a more coordinated approach to resilience-building and emergency preparedness.

While NLC is committed to helping cities, towns and villages strengthen community resilience, the federal government needs to do more to help local leaders prepare their communities for the increasing number and severity of disasters.
Federal Role in Building Stronger Cities, Towns and Villages

NLC strongly urges the federal government to provide funding directly to local governments for mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

An effective system must be developed to ensure that federal and state emergency management officials conduct substantive consultations with local officials for key decision-making affecting homeland security, disaster preparedness and response at the local level.

Federal and state technical and financial assistance should be structured to allow local officials maximum flexibility in rebuilding their infrastructure stronger to withstand future disasters.

In order to maintain viable communities and an economically sound nation, all levels of government must work together to reduce the likelihood of disaster losses incurred. Specifically, the federal government should:

- Continuously strive to improve the coordination of local, state, and federal disaster preparedness plans, including Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) operations;
- Ensure continued availability of adequate property and casualty insurance and excess insurance coverage to all regions of the nation, at affordable rates without unreasonable exclusions or geographic redlining;
- Provide clear and appropriate division of responsibilities between local, state, and federal governments in Presidentially declared disaster areas, with clear channels and protocols between leaders; and
- Ensure FEMA has the funding, authority, clear mandate, and flexibility it needs to respond quickly and effectively.

Disaster Prevention, Planning, and Mitigation

The highest priority of all levels of government in addressing disasters should be prevention and mitigation. Mitigation saves lives and reduces injuries; reduces economic losses; maintains and protects critical infrastructure; and reduces the liability borne by local governments and elected officials.

Knowing that improved safety from disasters in the future relies on what we can learn from the disasters of today, the federal government should collect data on the effects of disasters and lessons learned. Analysis of such data should be disseminated to aid state and local disaster-related efforts. Similarly, the federal government should provide technical assistance to state and local governments to help them conduct annual hazard and risk assessments to determine the vulnerability of areas or structures to disasters based on empirical data and information.

The federal government should provide an adequate level of funding for local emergency preparedness and disaster planning and management. Such funding should allow a city to tailor its disaster preparedness planning to the special circumstances and needs of the area, particularly to any facilities and densely populated areas that have the potential to be terrorist targets, as well as provide local governments with appropriate emergency response equipment and communication as necessary.

In addition to directly assisting cities and towns in their mitigation efforts, NLC urges the federal government to:
• Require federal agencies to develop and coordinate pre- and post-disaster mitigation programs for the types of emergencies they manage;
• Develop a comprehensive evaluation of risk factors for potential disasters;
• Make federal mitigation training programs more accessible and affordable and ensure that proven mitigation technology is more widely publicized and utilized;
• Support local governments in their efforts to encourage the public and private sectors to retrofit existing structures to reduce future losses from natural disasters and to locate new construction outside of high-risk areas such as flood plains, coastal areas or on or near earthquake faults;
• Encourage lending institutions to incorporate mitigation provisions as conditions for loans;
• Enact legislation that will allow for federal assistance in the accreditation of municipal levees in a cost-effective and responsible manner; and
• Support federal programs to encourage public, private, and individual disaster plans,

Disaster Response and Recovery

Federal programs should be structured to support municipal governments with adequate funding and authority to immediately and effectively respond to all types of disasters, including training and equipping first responders and the public and private critical lifeline services.

The federal government must increase funding to local governments for response, including processes to resolve equity issues in disaster relief efforts. The federal government must review all regulations dealing with disaster relief that raise equity issues, and based on such a review, propose corrective action. Specifically, when multiple cities have been damaged by a disaster, a formula or waiver process should be available to resolve disaster-related damage in a fair manner. The federal government also should allow municipalities to request their municipality be declared a disaster independently of other local government entities.

Additionally, the federal government should assist in the establishment and training of interdisciplinary, multi-jurisdictional search and rescue teams in each state to respond to and recover from natural and manufactured disasters.

When a city is asked by the federal government to provide services to citizens from jurisdictions outside their own in times of a declared state of emergency, it is the right of that city to recoup reimbursement from the federal government for expenses. Federal agencies must reimburse cities outside the declared state of emergency for costs related to disaster evacuation and sheltering, including straight time for city employees and the use of city-owned sheltering facilities at the direction of the federal government.

Federal Assistance After a Disaster

After a natural or man-made disaster, the federal government must provide a timely, streamlined, coordinated, and predictable economic assistance package to local communities to ensure long-term economic recovery and prosperity. The economic package should include federal grants, public loans, and public assisted private loans at favorable rates throughout the repayment cycle. The federal government must also provide technical assistance to assist local communities in accessing federal monetary assistance.

In providing this economic assistance, the federal government should follow these principles:
• This federal assistance must include direct grants to local government to replace city infrastructure, provide operating funds for continuance of government functions and key municipal-run services (e.g. water, police), as well as expedite economic recovery after damage to public buildings, business and manufacturing facilities, and other affected parties in local economies.

• It must minimize economic disruptions and losses from disasters through prompt reimbursement of all approved disaster recovery expenses.

• Local government authorities must be given decision-making authority and economic control in any unified redevelopment organization created by the federal government.

• Federal economic assistance must not promote and should strive to minimize competition between disaster struck cities and localities to attract business.

• The federal government must provide incentives to encourage the private sector to invest in sound recovery activities with some measure of accountability.

• The federal government must ensure that public and private funds are allocated to locally-based business as available, by maximizing the participation of local businesses and local residents in recovery projects, including the provision of training or re-training local residents as needed.

• The Small Business Administration should continue to play a critical role in recovery for small businesses after disasters.

• The federal government must restore homeowner investment equity levels for residents of disaster struck localities and promote future property investment in local communities.

Training and Technical Assistance

The federal government must provide technical assistance and regional training devoted to disaster preparedness and response. This technical assistance should include the gathering and regular dissemination of information to local governments on general disaster issues as well as specific disasters where they occur. As part of its technical assistance efforts, the federal government should encourage regions to share resources and equipment needed for preparedness and response through mutual aid agreements and regional coordination.

Impact to Vulnerable Communities

While there is a long list of lessons learned and after-action reports for all major disaster, there are still some lessons that we have not yet learned. One of those lessons is that the road to recovery is long and many times inequitable to vulnerable communities. There is a large body of research that shows certain communities and populations within communities are more likely to suffer during and after a disasters strike. These populations include immigrants, non-English speakers, communities of color, the poor, and people who live-in high-density housing. Specifically, low income families, are more likely to live in flood prone areas with insufficient infrastructure and inadequate flood control protections, if any at all. Lower income homeowners may lack the financial resources for flood insurance and access to networks to rebuild as quickly. Those who are economically disadvantaged often lack mobility and places to flee to when catastrophes strike—all of which undermine their ability to survive disasters and bounce back in the years that follow.
Studies also show that every disaster disproportionately and almost permanently disrupts the lives of those with the least resources to withstand disaster. These communities are often left without options or ability to continue their lives as normal after such emergencies.

The goal of resilience, preparedness, response and recovery should not be limited to ensuring that the wealthiest parts of a city come back to life; or that the downtown business district is protected, but also require that every resident, every neighborhood, every community is able to respond and quickly recover from a natural disaster. Federal, state and local efforts need to recognize the disparate impacts to vulnerable communities and require equitable re-investment to make these communities more resilient for future disasters.

**Climate Change Mitigation, Adaptation and Resilience**

In order to meet the carbon emissions reductions goals necessary to help mitigate the effects of climate change on communities, improving energy efficiency, increasing energy conservation and deploying renewable energy systems will be essential at the local, state and federal levels. These actions will save taxpayer dollars, boost the national and local economy, enhance national security, increase our nation’s energy independence, and improve environmental quality.

The federal government must develop policies to rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to prevent the worsening of the already measurable effects of climate change on the global environment. NLC urges the federal government to develop a multi-pollutant strategy to reduce emissions from power plants, mobile sources and other major sources to provide significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Moreover, climate change is a global problem that demands a global solution. As such, NLC supports the U.S.’s reengagement in the Paris Climate Agreement.

A successful national climate protection strategy must also focus on implementing adaptation measures that are necessary to prepare cities and residents for those changes that may be unavoidable. The range of adaptation issues must be uniquely addressed by each local government.

In order to help communities plan for the impacts of a changing climate and create resilient communities that can adapt in the face of challenges and changing circumstances, NLC urges the federal government to:

- Comprehensively study the effects of climate change on the nation’s cities, as well as different regional climate change impacts, and identify solutions to address current and future threats;
- Provide financial and technical assistance to support local government vulnerability assessments and climate change mitigation and adaptation implementation efforts;
- Ensure that local governments have the information, resources and tools to adequately plan for and respond to climate change effects;
- Establish a national climate service to communicate changes and impacts, and provide critical time-sensitive information to local governments and the public, as well as long-term climate change information;
- Require consideration of climate-related risks and vulnerabilities as part of all federal policies, practices, investments, and regulatory and other programs;
- Facilitate collaboration among federal, state and local authorities to share best practices and climate resilient strategies; and
• Fund a national public service campaign to inform the public about the impacts of climate change and the need for adaptation measures.

Disaster and Terrorism Insurance

In the wake of recent high-cost natural disasters and terrorist attacks, a number of insurance companies have been unable to properly cover the losses of their policy holders because the industry was overexposed to loss.

Since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the industry has virtually eliminated terrorism coverage, and if available, it is prohibitively expensive. Although a concentrated effort to prevent reliance on long-term, federally-subsidized disaster relief is necessary, an initial reinsurance system must be made available to bring stability to both industry and government as a safeguard against future acts of terrorism.

NLC urges the federal government to work with state and local governments, the insurance industry, and other stakeholders to:

• Develop insurance and reinsurance programs that will make it possible for private insurers and reinsurers to make affordable disaster insurance available to cover damage and loss caused by catastrophic natural disasters and terrorism;
• Encourage the insurance and reinsurance industries to provide incentives through rate adjustments that reward policy holders who take mitigation actions;
• Work to ensure that insurance companies do not overexpose or underexpose themselves to risk; and
• Develop an incentive-based disaster insurance and mitigation system that would encourage property owners to build new homes outside high risk areas, retrofit existing structures to reduce future losses, and enable government and business to obtain the proper coverage necessary for public safety, the delivery of public services, flow of commerce, and economic development.

Flood Insurance

We are concerned that there is still considerable uncertainty about the fate of the NFIP and how the proposed reforms will impact flood insurance rates for primary, non-primary and business properties. As Congress continues to consider these reforms to the NFIP, we believe the final legislation should:

• protect the grandfathering of flood insurance rates for properties that were built to code before FEMA’s adoption of flood maps;
• keep flood insurance rates affordable for primary, non-primary and business properties while balancing the fiscal solvency of the program;
• allow the federal government to work with state and local governments, the insurance industry, and other stakeholders to develop an incentive-based disaster insurance and mitigation system that would encourage property owners to retrofit existing structures to reduce future losses from natural disasters;
• encourage lending institutions to incorporate mitigation provisions as conditions for loans; and
• provide additional resources to FEMA to utilize the best technology and methods available to improve the mapping process, including seeking input from local government officials prior to approving any flood map that could impact local zoning rules.

Any reforms to the NFIP must improve the current mapping process. Too often the FEMA mapping process results in local governments having to fight inaccurate maps that do not consider locally built flood protection features and communities building off of outdated mapping, which results in artificially inflated risk. Further, many areas of the country are not mapped or mapped accurately, which results in communities who are at risk of flooding unaware of the risk.

Wildfires

Local elected officials have witnessed firsthand the economic, environmental, and social implications that wildland urban interface fires can create in unprepared communities. Every year, these images grow more widespread and familiar.

For cities, towns, and villages that are in the crossroads of the wildland urban interface, wildfire is no longer an exception — it is a fact of life. When wildfire enters a community, its path of destruction is fueled by overgrown, diseased, and drought-stricken vegetation. It destroys animal habitats, affects air quality, water quality and quality of life. When wildfire encounters what’s called a wildland-urban interface — like the wooded edge of a populous suburb — it can alter course, burning through homes, businesses, and infrastructure.

Each of these impacts comes with a price tag, which can quickly add up to tens of millions of dollars. But even more important than structures and money, wildfire may cost the lives of citizens, visitors, and firefighters/first responders.

Wildfire damages more than just what lies in its path: the aftermath of a burn is capable of contaminating or incapacitating watersheds. The deposition of ash, soot, and debris in reservoirs, streams, and water supplies for remote communities can prove catastrophic. Contaminated water means a temporary or even long-term loss of water supply — which can cripple a community economically. The significant expense of cleaning and rehabilitating, as well as any related lawsuits, is funded primarily by taxpayer dollars.

Worse, deforestation from so-called “crown fires” can sterilize the ground — leaving soils unable to collect and retain rainwater. This can increase the severity of flash floods and landslides for years. Mitigate or deflecting the damage is costly, and it requires committing both resources and personnel over extended periods of time. Over time, this issue can also cause subsidence issues with existing infrastructure, bridges, and buildings.

Preparedness and planning are key to mitigating the damage — and federal, state and local leaders should develop strategies to address the challenges these events impose.

Strategic wildfire planning does not have to mean clear-cutting or obliterating forested land. It does not necessarily involve unsightly or cost-prohibitive building regulations. But it does mean developing awareness and exposing risks, as well as identifying what outcomes are achievable through recognition, preparation, and dialog. NLC believes the federal government needs to provide additional technical assistance to help community leaders understand their roles in wildfire mitigation and planning.
Conclusion

NLC recognizes that the federal government’s ability, including FEMA, to help local governments recover quickly after a disaster has been severely impacted by the sheer number of disasters that have occurred over the past couple of years. Delays in federal assistance is putting the recovery efforts in cities, towns, and villages that have been hit the hardest by the recent disasters in jeopardy. Without immediate federal support, the losses to the local economy, jobs, and population mean it will take these communities much to recover and rebuild.

Protecting communities from future disasters will take significant additional commitment from every level of government – federal, state and local – without letting up on the efforts to recover from recent disasters.

To help local communities, as a part of our broader infrastructure campaign, NLC is calling on Congress to develop a coordinated federal plan that supports community resilience by passing legislation that will:

- Provide local governments with tools and information to mitigate risk and improve local infrastructure to better withstand extreme weather in the short- and long-term;
- Streamline federal assistance programs, such as CDBG Disaster Recovery grants, to ensure local governments can access and effectively use the resources they need for long-term recovery;
- Provide financial and technical assistance for local government vulnerability assessments and pre-disaster and hazard mitigation efforts;
- Provide local governments with incentives to consider the effects of climate change and extreme weather in their mitigation, adaptation, and resilience planning;
- Better align federal funding with local preparedness and resilience-building efforts to reduce the risks to the federal government from extreme weather;
- Dedicate a mandatory funding source for the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership program, which helps cities create and maintain local parks and outdoor recreation areas, particularly in underserved communities;
- Take urgent action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate the effects of climate change, including developing a multi-pollutant strategy to reduce emissions across a broad sector of the economy and incentivizing energy efficiency improvements and renewable energy development and deployment; and
- Reauthorize and fully fund the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant to assist cities with the development and implementation of efficiency and emissions reductions projects and plans.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony on an issue of essential importance to our nation’s cities, towns and villages.

Attached to this testimony is additional information regarding local priorities for an infrastructure plan and recent research by NLC on urban and rural economies and state preemption of local financing options.