

**Written Testimony of Jack Waldorf, Executive Director
Western Governors' Association**

**Submitted to the United States Senate
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
May 19, 2026**

Fiscal Year 2027 Appropriations

Chair Britt, Ranking Member Murphy, and Members of the Subcommittee, the Western Governors' Association (WGA) appreciates the opportunity to provide written testimony on the appropriations and activities of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). WGA is an independent organization representing the Governors of the 22 westernmost states and territories. The Association is an instrument of the Governors for bipartisan policy development, information sharing, and collective action on issues of critical importance to the western United States.

Western Governors recognize the importance of a close and productive working relationship between states, territories, and the federal government and understand that more effective intergovernmental cooperation depends on federal recognition of states as co-sovereigns and partners. The promotion of a greater partnership between states and the federal government is central to the mission of WGA. Western Governors encourage the Subcommittee to direct federal agencies to improve their internal processes and coordinate with states and territories on federal policies and procedures, as well as integrate state and territorial data into federal programs, including for policymaking purposes.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) plays a critical role in coordinating disaster response and recovery across states, territories, and local communities, and Western Governors emphasize the importance of a strong central federal capability to support preparedness, response, and recovery nationwide. Federal personnel, equipment, and technical expertise are essential to our rural communities, many of which have limited capacity to manage disaster response and recovery. To support these efforts, federal agencies conducting disaster recovery and assistance, as well as the programs which they administer, should receive adequate and consistent funding and allow Western Governors and their designated state agencies to have critical input on where those funds are needed most. The lack of speed, certainty, and consistency in deployment of federal disaster funding is a hindrance to coordinated recovery efforts and effective utilization of public funds.

Hazard mitigation and risk reduction are the most cost-effective methods of reducing the effect of natural disasters and lowering costs associated with post-disaster restoration. FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Assistance grant programs, including the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities program, Flood Mitigation Assistance, Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, and Pre-Disaster Mitigation grant program, all play a significant role in western states' and territories' ability to take proactive action that can reduce the damage of disasters. However, some types of disasters are more prevalent in or unique to the West – wildfire, severe drought, and earthquakes,

for example – and Western Governors are eager to work with FEMA to better address the unique mitigation needs associated with these events. Western Governors also support allowing home hardening and retrofitting as allowable uses of federal resources to support community resilience, which is particularly important in areas at extreme risk of wildfire.

In a 2019 study, the National Institute of Building Sciences found that every federal dollar spent in mitigation grants saved the American taxpayer six dollars in post-disaster spending. Western Governors encourage the Subcommittee to consider this return on investment and provide increased funding for FEMA’s mitigation grant programs. Further, if the key to minimizing the effect of disasters and emergencies is pre-disaster mitigation, then steps need to be taken to reduce or minimize the cost share that is associated with many, if not all, of these grants.

Post-disaster response and recovery programs are equally critical. FEMA programs like the Community Disaster Loan Program, Disaster Assistance, and Fire Management Assistance Grants should be adequately funded to enable states and territories to quickly respond to and recover from disasters. The Emergency Management Performance Grant Program (EMPG) is the primary funding source for local emergency managers, and funding for this program has effectively decreased due to inflation. Western Governors support increasing EMPG funding to expand state and territorial capacity to provide technical assistance and expedite reimbursement for FEMA public assistance applicants.

Disaster recovery also depends on timely, clear guidance to help states and communities navigate federal programs and deploy resources efficiently. Western Governors have worked with federal partners to improve interagency coordination on post wildfire restoration, including developing a roadmap of available assistance and identifying community navigators to help communities prioritize recovery needs. Western Governors urge the Subcommittee to prioritize funding for community navigator efforts for all hazards events and other post disaster restoration needs.

When managing disaster declarations, state and local governments coordinate billions of dollars in federal grants through FEMA. To help offset the administrative requirements of these grants, FEMA regulations allow recipients to utilize a percentage for management costs. These management costs, however, are limited to each specific disaster and regulations do not allow grantees to economize by managing workloads across all open disasters. Western Governors urge the Subcommittee to direct FEMA to allow grantees to utilize management costs across all open disasters, which will build recovery and mitigation capacity, incentivize disaster close-out, and reduce the overall cost of managing disaster response.

Rising rates of opioid overdoses and deaths also constitute an urgent public health and safety crisis. Reducing the effects of the opioid crisis involves stemming the supply of illegally produced opioids. Western Governors request that the Subcommittee direct U.S. Customs and Border Protection to work closely with Governors to combat illicit drug trafficking and the manufacture and distribution of counterfeit medications. Western Governors also urge the Subcommittee to appropriate sufficient funding to agencies to provide financial support and reimbursement to states and territories for interdiction activities.

The Governors recognize the importance of federal disaster and counterdrug programs for the nation and especially the West. The Subcommittee should carefully consider the funding needs of these programs as the number, severity, and overall cost of disasters continue to rise, and public health and safety are increasingly threatened by the evolving opioid crisis.

WGA policy resolutions 2026-05, Disaster Preparedness and Response; 2026-04, Housing is Foundational to the Success of the West; 2024-04, Combating the Opioid Crisis; and 2024-01, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship, provide additional detail on the Governors' collective perspectives on matters within the purview of the Subcommittee.

Western Governors recognize the enormous challenge you have in balancing competing funding priorities and appreciate the difficulty of the decisions the Subcommittee must make. These recommendations are offered in a spirit of cooperation and respect, and WGA is prepared to assist you as the Subcommittee discharges its critical and challenging responsibilities.