

United States Senate Committee On
**HOMELAND SECURITY
& GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS**

Ranking Member Gary Peters
Ranking Member Andy Kim



DELAYED BY DESIGN

**Disaster Survivors Left Behind
by DHS Secretary Noem's
\$100,000 Approval Policy**

HSGAC Minority Staff Report

March 2026

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
INTRODUCTION	3
FINDINGS	7
July Flash Floods in Texas.....	8
Hurricane Helene	10
Armed Guard Protective Services.....	12
Public Assistance	14
Disaster Unemployment Assistance	15
Individuals and Households Program - Housing Inspections	17
Individuals and Households Program - Temporary Housing Installations	19
Crisis Counseling	21
CONCLUSION.....	23
APPENDIX.....	24

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On June 11, 2025, Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Kristi Noem, issued a directive stating that, “[e]ffective immediately ... any grant or contract award in excess of \$100,000” would require the personal approval of the DHS Secretary and that the directive “supersedes all previous guidance on spending...”¹ U.S. Senator Gary Peters, Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs (HSGAC), U.S. Senator Andy Kim, Ranking Member of the HSGAC Subcommittee on Disaster Management, District of Columbia, and Census, and their Minority staff (hereinafter “Minority staff”) completed an investigation and found that the implementation of the Secretary’s directive—especially with an approval requirement at such a granular threshold—has created extraordinary bureaucratic gridlock, significant operational challenges, and has hampered critical missions, including disaster response. The real-world impacts of the new approval directive are extensive and have delayed support to survivors, including those of the fatal July 2025 flash floods in Texas and Hurricane Helene.

This report, issued by Minority staff, is based on an analysis of the DHS Secretary’s approval tracker, created in response to the June directive to track spending requests exceeding \$100,000, which was provided by whistleblowers to the Committee. The internal tracker covers approval considerations from June 2025 through September 8, 2025.² Minority staff reviewed 1,062 spending requests in the internal tracker. An analysis of the data in the internal tracker shows that the Secretary’s directive has delayed Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) spending requests and violates the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 (PKEMRA), a law passed by Congress in 2006 following the dismal response by FEMA and other federal agencies to Hurricane Katrina, which claimed the lives of almost 1,400 individuals.

Minority staff also found that the Secretary’s directive delayed approval or left approval pending for 1,034 contracts, grants, or disaster assistance awards as of September 8, 2025. Based on Minority staff analysis, as of September 8, 2025, the Secretary had only verbally approved approximately 13% of all requests, including those that were delayed, with the average request taking three weeks to approve. Minority staff also identify in this report 29 examples of spending requests exceeding \$100,000 that were submitted to the Secretary and were delayed in receiving approval, or as of September 8, 2025, were pending despite being requested much earlier. In addition, this report finds that armed guard protective services, public assistance, disaster unemployment assistance, individuals and housing program – inspections and temporary housing installations, crisis counseling, and more had delayed or outstanding spending requests impacting states across the country.

Rather than meeting the Administration’s stated goal of addressing waste, the Secretary’s policy has caused delays and hardship for communities needing prompt assistance, in addition to violating federal law. While spending oversight is essential and is the responsibility of FEMA,

¹ Memorandum from Kristi Noem, Secretary of Homeland Security, to DHS Component Heads, Spending over \$100,000 (June 11, 2025).

² S1 FEMA Tracker, (copy on file with Committee). Minority staff note that three spending requests in the internal tracker pre-date the June 11 directive and are unclear as to why these spending requests are included.

DHS, the DHS Office of Inspector General, the Government Accountability Office, and the Office of Management and Budget, this Administration's actions do not constitute real checks on fraud, waste, and abuse.

Secretary Noem should immediately provide Congress with a full and accurate accounting of the delays that have been created by the new approval directive. The DHS Inspector General should immediately assess potential waste and harms caused by this new directive and the associated delays, including any increase in costs that could have been avoided. Finally, Secretary Noem must rescind the directive, comply with PKEMRA as Congress intended and stop "significantly and substantially" reducing FEMA's "missions, authorities, responsibilities."