

Jefferson County
Board of Commissioners
Agenda Request

To: Board of Commissioners
Mark McCauley, County Administrator

From: Monte Reinders, Public Works Director/County Engineer 

Agenda Date: September 15, 2025

Subject: Letters of Support for Fixing Emergency Management for Americans (FEMA)
H.R. 4669

Statement of Issue:

Urge members of Congress to support the Fixing Emergency Management for Americans (FEMA) H.R. 4669 as per the request from the National Association of County Engineers (NACE), which is attached.

Analysis/Strategic Goals/Pro's & Con's:

Jefferson County has relied heavily on the Federal Emergency Management Administration for relieve following storm-related disaster. It is safe to say that some Jefferson County roads would no longer be passable if it were not for the millions of dollars provided by FEMA over the last several decades. Unfortunately, the process to receive assistance from FEMA has become overly-complicated and can no longer be relied upon. H.R. 4669 attempts to fix some of these problems, and NACE is encouraging counties to urge their members of Congress to pass this legislation.

Fiscal Impact/Cost Benefit Analysis:

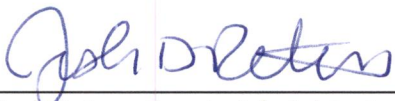
Potentially millions of dollars of current and future FEMA reimbursements are at stake, which could impact the viability of county roads well into the future.

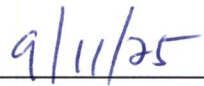
Recommendation:

Please sign the attached letters requesting Congress to pass H.R. 4669.

Department Contact: Monte Reinders, Public Works Director/County Engineer x242

Reviewed By:


Josh Peters, County Administrator


Date

Monte Reinders

From: NACE - National Association of County Engineers <nace-countyengineers.org@shared1.ccsend.com>
Sent: Friday, September 5, 2025 8:26 AM
To: Monte Reinders
Subject: Urge Congress to support the FEMA Act for Stronger Disaster Response

ALERT: BE CAUTIOUS This email originated outside the organization. Do not open attachments or click on links if you are not expecting them.



National Association of County Engineers
The Voice of County Road Officials

The following content has been provided by our friends at the National Association of Counties (NACo), of which NACE is an affiliate.

Urge Congress to support the FEMA Act for stronger disaster response

On Wednesday, Sept. 3, the U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee overwhelmingly approved the [Fixing Emergency Management for Americans \(FEMA\) Act \(H.R. 4669\)](#) by a vote of 57-3. This critical piece of legislation contains a number of wins for counties that were directly advocated for by [NACo's Intergovernmental Disaster Reform Task Force](#). NACE was represented on this Task Force by Western Region Vice-President Matt Machado.

As the bill now heads to the full U.S. House for a vote, you can help to turn these hard-fought wins into law. Contact your House member and urge them to support the FEMA Act. Your voice as a local road professional is essential to securing a more effective and responsive emergency management system for all communities.

Key wins in the bill include:

- Transitioning FEMA's Public Assistance Program from a reimbursement to a grant model, with the opportunity for grants to be made directly to counties
- Streamlining environmental and historic preservation reviews
- Creating a universal disaster application for disaster survivors
- Restructuring FEMA's pre-disaster mitigation program by moving it to a formula-based grant



Board of County Commissioners
1820 Jefferson Street
PO Box 1220
Port Townsend, WA 98368

Heather Dudley-Nollette, District 1 Heidi Eisenhour, District 2 Greg Brotherton, District 3

September 15, 2025

The Honorable Patty Murray
U.S. Senator
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Murray:

On behalf of Jefferson County, WA, we write to express our strong support for the bipartisan *Fixing Emergency Management for Americans (FEMA) Act* (H.R. 4669). This legislation provides long-overdue reforms to streamline disaster recovery, increase transparency and efficiency, and make federal assistance more accessible to the communities we serve.

Counties are the nation's frontline responders during disasters – providing emergency services, clearing debris, operating shelters, and managing long-term recovery. Yet we often face an overly bureaucratic and delayed federal process that slows our ability to deliver timely support to residents and rebuild critical infrastructure. The FEMA Act directly addresses these barriers.

Specifically, we support key provisions in the FEMA Act that will have a transformative impact on county disaster response and recovery:

- **Universal Disaster Application:** Simplifies and unifies survivor applications across federal agencies, reducing confusion, duplication, and delays for disaster survivors during the most stressful times of their lives.
- **Public Assistance Program Reform:** Transitions from a reimbursement-based model to a grant-based model for FEMA Public Assistance, ensuring counties – many of which operate on tight budgets – can more quickly restore vital infrastructure without fronting millions of dollars.
- **Public Assistance Dashboard:** Increases transparency and visibility into the status of project approvals, obligations, and disbursements, helping counties plan better, hold partners accountable and identify bottlenecks.
- **Mitigation Program Reforms:** Modernizes FEMA's mitigation programs so counties can proactively address vulnerabilities before the next disaster strikes, better protecting lives, property and taxpayer dollars.

Here in Jefferson County, FEMA has “come to the rescue” many times to fix county road infrastructure damaged in major storms that lash the West Coast during the winter. These roads could not have been repaired without the funding provided through the FEMA program. Jefferson County simply does not have the financial resources to do so, especially considering the loss of over \$1,000,000 per year to the County’s Road Fund from the federal timber revenue program (often called “Secure Rural Schools”) that was slashed 15 years ago.

Time and time again, some of our most isolated residents have been completely cut off and stranded behind impassable road washouts, and the County could only take quick action to repair these sites knowing that FEMA would be there with funding to “fill the hole”. In recent years, however, our confidence that federal assistance will be available after these events has diminished, leaving the County with no option but to leave roads in impassable or barely passable condition.

Jefferson County has enjoyed a good working relationship with Washington State’s Department of Emergency Management (WA DEM) which acts as the conduit for FEMA funds to the County. Unfortunately, we’ve witnessed FEMA’s federal process become more and more complex, which has resulted in years of delay in getting reimbursed. For example, despite WA DEM’s best efforts, Jefferson County is still waiting to be reimbursed for over \$500,000 worth of work performed in 2015 to restore access on the Oil City Road, which is the only access for a group of county residents, but also serves as the sole access to an iconic National Park Trailhead. There has never been any question about this being an eligible FEMA project, and FEMA fully acknowledges that this is an “approved” project. But complex and arcane post-project environmental reviews, which seem to have no end in sight, have stalled reimbursement indefinitely. It has been so long, that the river which originally caused the road washout has now moved a half mile away from the site and is no longer even visible, and yet the project remains hung up in “after-the-fact” permitting.

In another example, a section of Lords Lake Road collapsed nearly 6 years ago forcing residents to squeeze by a dangerous drop off to access their homes. Jefferson County has spent that time working with FEMA to justify the proposed repair technique, acquire environmental permits, secure right of way, and prepare bid documents that meet FEMA’s requirements. And yet, with the project ready to build, we now find ourselves having to justify cost increases due to 6 years of inflation before adequate funds will be released for construction resulting in at least another year of delay. Seven years for a project that will take 4 weeks to build.

In 2023, the County was able to successfully use \$1,000,000 in FEMA Hazard Mitigation funds to replace an undersized culvert that threatened destroy downstream homes and a popular recreational lake. This was a project the County had identified as a high priority for over 25 years. It required five years to apply for and acquire the FEMA funding through a process so complex that it required hiring a consultant in another state just to prepare the grant application. After completing the project, it took FEMA another six months to reimburse the County for the approved work due to an administrative oversight on FEMA’s end. This put significant financial strain on the County while waiting for reimbursement. In the end, however, the project was a great success and demonstrates the importance of supporting and continuing this FEMA program.

In 2016, a landslide threatened to cut off access to a dozen homes on the Undi Road. Thanks to an all-out effort by the County, WA DEM, and FEMA, we were able to construct a new road in a

different location by the end of the year. The old road completely disappeared one month after the new road was opened. This \$1.5 million dollar project was an example of a great success and demonstrates that it is possible for FEMA to act quickly. Unfortunately, it now appears that FEMA is vastly understaffed and under-resourced meaning quick action like this is no longer possible.

The list of FEMA funded repair projects completed in Jefferson County could go on for many more pages.

At this critical moment – with growing disaster frequency, increased financial strain, and persistent recovery challenges – the FEMA Act offers counties a pathway to more timely, coordinated, and effective disaster assistance. The bill recognizes counties as essential partners in emergency management and reflects meaningful engagement with local officials across the country.

We thank you for your leadership and urge swift passage of the FEMA Act to better serve our residents and strengthen the nation's disaster response and recovery framework.

Sincerely,

Heather Dudley-Nollette, Dist. 1

Heidi Eisenhour, Dist. 2 - Chair

Greg Brotherton, Dist. 3



Lords Lake Road – Still Awaiting FEMA Construction Funding 6 Years Later



Oil City Road (2015) – Still Waiting for \$500,000 from FEMA for the repair completed in 2015



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