



U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20472

FEMA

December 17, 2024

The Honorable Marsha Blackburn
United States Senate
357 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Blackburn:

This is a response to your letter dated November 18, 2024, sharing your concerns and questions regarding a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) crew lead's unacceptable instruction to disaster relief workers in Florida.

Every day, more than 22,000 FEMA employees adhere to FEMA's Core Values and are dedicated to helping people before, during, and after disasters. As you noted in your letter, recently one FEMA employee departed from these values to advise her Disaster Survivor Assistance (DSA) team to "avoid homes advertising Trump" during Hurricane Milton relief efforts in Florida. This is a clear violation of FEMA's Core Values and principles to help all people regardless of their political affiliation or any other status.

This employee's conduct was reprehensible, and this type of behavior and action will not be tolerated at FEMA. The work we do at FEMA is not, has never been, and should never be partisan – emergencies and disasters don't respect geographic or political boundaries.

FEMA's Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR) commenced an internal investigation the same day it was informed of a complaint a DSA team had been told to avoid homes advertising Trump and, following standard process for cases involving potential violations of the Hatch Act, referred the matter to the U.S. Office of Special Counsel (OSC). At the request of the DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) on November 15, OPR suspended its investigation.

On November 19 I personally requested Inspector General Cuffari "to conduct an independent inquiry to include all Helene and Milton disasters." At the request of the OIG, OPR suspended its investigation on November 15, 2024. On December 3, the OIG informed OPR that it could recommence its internal investigation. FEMA understands from the OIG that it will be reviewing some aspect of this matter through its Office of Audit, however, please contact the OIG for further information on its activities.

The OSC's investigation is ongoing. Please contact OSC for any questions on its investigation. FEMA will also cooperate with Tennessee Governor Lee and Attorney General Skrmetti's investigation into potential discrimination against Tennesseans referenced in your November 18, 2024 letter.

If you have any additional questions, please have a member of your staff contact FEMA's Office of Congressional Affairs at (202) 646-4500.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deanne Criswell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "D" and a long, sweeping underline.

Deanne Criswell
Administrator