

**Written Testimony of James D. Ogsbury, Executive Director
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**Submitted to the United States Senate
Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Homeland Security
May 10, 2022**

Fiscal Year 2023 Appropriations

Chair Murphy, Ranking Member Capito, 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.

The western United States has seen a significant increase in major disasters and extreme weather events. In 2020 there were 230 major disaster or emergency declarations, which easily surpassed the previous record of 128 dating back to 2011. Further burdening the nation, in 2020 the number of federally declared disasters which resulted in costs exceeding \$1 billion was 22, also a new record. Certain types of disasters are more frequent in the West than other parts of the nation, and result in a devastating amount of damage. According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, almost 96 percent of the West is in a declared drought (compared to 12 percent in the northeast, 34 percent in the southeast, and 37 percent in the Midwest), with over 20 percent of the West in an extreme or exceptional drought. On their own, these drought conditions devastate local communities and the agricultural and livestock industries in the West. These conditions also pave the way for another disaster just as destructive, but far more deadly – wildfires. In 2020 alone, wildfires affected 10.1 million acres across the United States. Of that, 90 percent, or 9.1 million acres, of wildfire-affected land was in the West. This is more than the total acreage of the states of Maryland and Rhode Island combined.

For these reasons, DHS programs, particularly those related to pre- and post-disaster, play an enormous role in the viability of the West, not only in terms of its economic vitality, but also in its flora and fauna, its infrastructure, and its general livability. In terms of hazard mitigation, the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) grant programs, including the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC), Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA), Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), and Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM), all play a significant role in western states' ability to help withstand disasters and lessen the damage thereof.

Hazard mitigation and risk reduction are cost-effective methods of reducing the effect of natural disasters and lowering costs associated with post-disaster restoration. 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 future spending. That level of return on

investment cannot be overlooked or ignored, and Western Governors encourage the Subcommittee to fully fund FEMA's HMA grant program.

Unfortunately, not all disasters can be avoided, and post-disaster response and recovery programs are just as important as hazard mitigation, especially to the communities affected by natural disasters. FEMA programs like the Community Disaster Loan Program, Disaster Assistance, and the Fire Management Assistance Grants, should be adequately funded to give states the ability to quickly respond to and recover from disasters.

Federal agencies should provide state, territorial, local, and tribal government officials with accessible and clear information on available federal resources and programs and the most effective utilization of those resources in disaster recovery. WGA has worked with federal partners to improve interagency coordination on post-wildfire restoration work, including a roadmap of assistance available to communities affected by wildfire and identification of "navigators" to help communities prioritize post-wildfire restoration needs. Western Governors urge the federal government to prioritize the funding of these important efforts, as they should have a positive effect on maximizing the value of restoration work and, more importantly, addressing the needs of communities affected by wildfire.

The cybersecurity of states and the nation, which is an all-of-government and industry-wide endeavor, is an utmost priority for Western Governors as well. The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed society and accelerated the shift to a virtual environment, further increasing vulnerabilities across systems as threat actors become more complex and widespread. In recent years, the Governors have witnessed an alarming acceleration of attacks targeting every level of government and spanning across critical infrastructure sectors. Western Governors support sufficient funding for the Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) and its functions, including the Office of Cybersecurity and Communications, CISA Central, and state, local, tribal, and territorial engagement. WGA was pleased to see some funding allocated to CISA in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (Pub. L. 117-58) and would appreciate continued funding to the Agency for these purposes.

Western Governors encourage the Subcommittee to provide funding for cybersecurity research and development, including the use of blockchain and encryption by perpetrators and its utility for defense against cyber threats, addressing vulnerabilities of other emerging technologies like connected vehicles and Internet of Things devices, and providing strong support to states to meet election security needs.

Western Governors recognize the importance these disaster and cybersecurity programs have on the nation, but especially in the West, and urge the Subcommittee to carefully consider the funding needs of these programs, especially as the number, severity, and overall cost of disasters and cyber incidents continue to rise. 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.