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Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittees:
Agriculture, Rural Development, and Related Agencies
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

Chellie Pingree
Congress of the United States
1st District, Maine

January 22. 2014

W. Craig Fugate
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
500 C. Street SW
Washington, DC 20472

Dear Administrator Fugate,

I write to urge the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to consider all available data in finalizing new Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM) for areas in Cumberland and York Counties, Maine, to take the same approach to data generated by municipalities as it has in past flood mapping processes, and to ensure locally generated data receives balanced consideration during the rate map appeals process.

As I am sure you are aware, southern Maine includes some of the most unique coastal geography in the country, which presents complex challenges to accurate assessment of flood risk. In the past, FEMA utilized region-specific data generated by engineers employed by certain coastal communities to assist with preparation of FIRMs. For example, during the 2009 Map Modernization effort, FEMA accepted region-specific technical data from municipalities along Maine's southern coast to generate more accurate maps. In the current Risk Map process, however; FEMA Region 1 has been reluctant to accept the same data generated by engineers on behalf of other coastal communities. This has resulted in differing base flood elevations for neighboring towns, a difference which FEMA has yet to justify with scientific data. FEMA should adopt the same standards for considering region-specific data for these current maps and affected municipalities as it has in the past.

In addition, members of my staff asked FEMA Region 1 officials to provide the municipalities with access to all of the technical data that it used to arrive at the current state of its flood maps for southern Maine. Following county coordination meetings in the first week of January, FEMA officials assured my staff that this information would be provided to these municipalities as soon as possible. It is extremely important to me that my constituents have access to all the technical data used to generate FEMA's flood risks before any appeal process begins. Please provide an update on your response to that request.

Communities that are going to be affected by new flood maps deserve the same treatment that their neighbors previously received and they deserve to see the data that FEMA has used to come up with these maps. This process can have a significant effect on property values and the people who live in these communities deserve fair treatment and an open and transparent process.

It is essential that FEMA's standards for consideration of local data during the appellate process are fully understood by these local communities. If, in your analysis, you determine that FEMA is now unable to consider region-specific data generated by local communities, please explain why it is now prevented from doing so, allowing these communities to fully prepare for the appellate process. At the very least, the appellate process itself should take account of all the available data, and region-specific data generated for local communities should be given the same weight that FEMA's own data receives.

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I appreciate FEMA's efforts to engage with local communities during this complicated process, and for your attention to this request. If you have any questions, please have your staff contact Jim Pineau in my Portland office at 207.774.5019.

Sincerely,

Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress