Re: Appropriation for the Flood Risk Mapping Program of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

Dear Chairman Shelby and Ranking Member Leahy,

The Association of State Floodplain Managers (ASFPM) is very concerned about the diminished level of funding for FEMA’s Flood Risk Mapping Program in the Fiscal Year 2020 Homeland Security Appropriations bill. We very much appreciate that the Senate Appropriations Committee has for many years consistently supported funds for mapping at higher levels than the budget requests.

The committee once again provided funding at a level higher than the $100 million budget request, but at a much reduced level from the past several years. Your bill provides $148 million while the House bill provides $263 million, the same level as was enacted for FY19 and FY18.

Ironically, Congress has recognized the need for investment in hazard mitigation in order to reduce the growing costs to taxpayers related to natural disasters, and has made great strides in allocating more funds for this purpose. Flooding is our nation’s most frequent and costly natural disaster, averaging more than $20 billion in losses each year this decade (up from $10 billion per year a decade ago). Yet flood hazard mitigation is dependent upon accurate and up-to-date identification of flood risk via mapping.

There are major unmet needs for mapping. Only about 1/3 of the nation’s stream miles and coasts have a FEMA flood map. Where FEMA has mapped floodplains, only 74% of them are verified to be valid. Several communities still have older paper maps that haven’t even been converted into a digital format, much less updated. FEMA has only partially mapped two of the five required elements of the National Flood Mapping Program. It still needs to map areas of potential population growth in the 100- and 500-year floodplains, areas of residual risk, areas that could be inundated as a result of the failure of a flood control structure, and the level of

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protection provided by flood control structures. The Technical Mapping Advisory Council also has recommended more granular, structure-specific flood risk data. And consistent with congressional direction in the Biggert-Waters NFIP Reform Act of 2012, TMAC developed recommendations for incorporating future-conditions risk assessments and modeling into flood insurance studies and maps.

There are many areas of the nation using maps that are more than 20 years old, and based on old hydrologic data, and in many areas where growth is occurring that have never been mapped. This leads to new development being inadequately elevated relative to appropriate safety levels, leaving communities with greater flood risks and higher flood insurance premiums, and burdening federal taxpayers with higher flood disaster costs.

We appreciate that the committee is aware of the multiple uses of flood maps beyond identifying properties required to purchase flood insurance. As you know, the maps guide safe management of flood risks, decisions about development and permitting, infrastructure planning and engineering, and data to help communities plan for evacuation during extreme events, which we are seeing more frequently.

As you sort out priorities in the Homeland Security Bill, we urge you to fund mapping at the $263 million level to support efforts to reduce disaster-related costs to taxpayers.

ASFPM is a national association of more than 19,000 members who are state and local officials, private sector planners, engineers, mappers and academics who support the work of state and local floodplain managers. All of our members are committed to reducing loss of life and property due to floods.

We are grateful for your understanding of the importance of FEMA’s Flood Risk Mapping Program and hope you will be able to reinstate funding in the FY 2020 Homeland Security appropriations bill to the FY19 level of $263 million, which is also the amount provided in the House version of the FY20 Homeland Security appropriations bill.

With best regards,

Chad Berginnis
ASFPM Executive Director

Cc: Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Chair, Homeland Security Subcommittee
Honorable Jon Tester
Ranking Minority Member, Homeland Security Subcommittee

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