

Statement of Deanne Criswell

**Nominee for Administrator of Federal Emergency Management Agency
Department of Homeland Security**

**Before the
U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs**

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Good Morning Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Portman, and distinguished members of the Committee.

I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee for the position of Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. I would like to start by thanking Senator Gillibrand for her kind introduction. It has been a true honor to serve in New York City as the Commissioner for New York City Emergency Management.

I would also like to thank my family and friends for all their support through this process. In particular I would like to recognize my two sons, RJ and Eddie, who are here with me today. They have sacrificed much over the years and have supported me throughout my service to our country and I am very happy that they could join me here today.

I believe in FEMA's mission of helping people before, during, and after disasters – particularly as we seek to bring an end to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pathway to a ready and resilient nation requires a shared vision that takes a proactive mindset:

- We must reduce risk through system-based mitigation;
- We must increase the resilience of our communities so they can adapt as threats change; and
- We must scale our response to minimize the consequences of disasters and emergencies.

I understand this is a challenging mission. If confirmed, I welcome the opportunity to meet this challenge and lead FEMA in its effort to create a more prepared and resilient nation.

I have spent most of my life in public service, which has helped prepare me for this challenge and respond to novel and emerging threats across federal, state, and local levels. I have served as a local emergency manager for a small jurisdiction and a major urban area. I retired after 21 years as a traditional guardsman in the Colorado Air National Guard. I also spent six years at

FEMA leading responses across the nation. And I held a leadership position in the private sector supporting communities in their preparedness efforts.

I began my career in Aurora, Colorado, first as a firefighter and paramedic, and eventually taking on the role of emergency manager. In this role, Aurora was asked to provide mass care services to evacuees leaving Louisiana because of Hurricane Katrina. We supported nearly 1,000 survivors in their sheltering needs and ultimately helped reunite them with their families who were evacuated across the country. I learned the importance of collaboration to meet shared goals, bringing stakeholders together, and building relationships with partners.

This last year has been the most challenging of my career. As New York City responded to the impacts brought on by the COVID-19 global pandemic, I led a team that worked tirelessly to prevent the collapse of the healthcare system. At the same time, we also established a number of first-time programs. We worked to ensure no one went hungry, standing up a first of its kind program to provide sheltering options for vulnerable populations. Sadly, we also implemented a mass-fatality operation to meet the scale and severity of the impacts of COVID-19. We had to have the ability to make decisions with imperfect information and pivot as more details become available—a critical skill that emergency managers across this country must have to set them apart.

As FEMA responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, it also must also support communities in preparing for future challenges and adapting to a changing world. The 2020 Atlantic Hurricane season brought a record 30 named storms, and we also saw wildfires cause significant damage. I believe the best way to balance the competing demands is to make risk reduction investments to build more resilient communities and infrastructure, including against the threat of climate change. FEMA has developed robust preparedness and response capabilities, and now we also have an incredible opportunity to reduce risk.

There is an opportunity in front of us to continue to build on the successes the emergency management community have made and continue our work to professionalize this young discipline. As we look to the future, I believe emergency management across the nation is at a pivotal point. As an emergency manager, I have always focused on keeping families and communities safe. There is nothing more rewarding than being able to help the people of this country. I am deeply grateful to be nominated for the important role. If I am confirmed, I commit to firmly establishing and defining the essential role of emergency management at all levels in support of the American people.

Finally, I understand the importance of working closely with Congress and Members of this Committee to make sure FEMA is responsive to your communities and the people you represent. I have appreciated the opportunity to speak with Members on both sides of the aisle about the importance of emergency management, and—if confirmed—commit to working in a bipartisan manner at all times.

Thank you for your consideration of my nomination, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.