



July 22, 2025

House Select Committee on Disaster Preparedness & Flooding
Public Hearing Wednesday, July 23, 2025 at 9:00am
Room: E1.030
Via House Comment Portal

Public Comment on Disaster Preparedness and Flooding

Dear Chairs, Vice Chairs, and Members of the Senate and House Select Committees on Disaster Preparedness and Flooding:

Bayou City Waterkeeper, an organization deeply engaged in advocating for healthy waterways and resilient communities across the 10-county lower Galveston Bay watershed, submits these comments today on two critical issues facing our state: **disaster preparedness** and **flood infrastructure**. Our work, spanning from Lake Livingston and Lake Houston downstream to Galveston Bay, provides us with direct insight into the urgent and complex flooding challenges facing this vast region. In March, [we submitted comments](#) to the Texas Water Development Board on the Flood Infrastructure Fund's draft project priority list, demonstrating our ongoing advocacy on our state's flood issues. With recent federal program changes, particularly the FEMA rollback that [threatens to overwhelm states](#) and leave communities to face disasters alone, it is more critical than ever that Texas takes meaningful action to address these escalating risks. The state has the responsibility to proactively identify, invest in, and strengthen support for our most vulnerable communities.

First, regarding **state disaster preparations and response capabilities**, we emphasize the invaluable lessons learned in the Greater Houston area. Our region has faced an extraordinary number of federally declared disasters – [29 in the last 45 years, with approximately 11 of those occurring in just the last decade – predominantly flooding events](#). This challenging experience has forged deep expertise in disaster response and long-term recovery among our local leaders and organizations. The state has a tremendous amount to learn from Houston's unique navigation of these frequent events. We strongly encourage this committee to engage directly with Houston's proven disaster response and recovery leaders, as their on-the-ground experience can yield crucial statewide recommendations.

Second, concerning **state flood planning and flood infrastructure**, the adoption of Texas' first State Flood Plan in 2024 was a momentous step forward in protecting Texans. This plan, developed by experts from the Texas Water Development Board and local representatives across 15 regional flood planning groups, provides common-sense, watershed-scale measures for risk mitigation. However, a plan is only as good as its

implementation, and the 89th Legislature unfortunately missed a critical opportunity by failing to meaningfully implement many of its key legislative recommendations.

We urge this committee to [champion these recommendations](#):

- **Establishing and funding a technical assistance program** specifically for floodplain management activities in small, rural, and socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. As recent floods have shown in areas like Liberty and Montgomery Counties, these vulnerable communities often lack the resources to protect themselves, making this program essential for equitable, statewide resilience.
- **Clarifying county authority to establish and collect drainage fees in unincorporated areas.** This would empower local communities to address their specific flood risks and close a significant flood mitigation funding gap.
- **Developing and adopting statewide minimum design standards** for infrastructure and buildings to reduce loss of life and property from flooding. These standards are crucial for building smarter and more resiliently across the entire state.
- **Updating statewide building codes.** With recent federal program changes threatening to overwhelm states, it is now more critical than ever that Texas takes proactive steps to strengthen its own building codes to protect communities, ensuring we are not left to face future disasters alone.

Finally, the state must increase appropriations directly to the Flood Infrastructure Fund (FIF). The FIF, established in 2019, is designed to provide crucial grant funding to communities for planning, design/construction, warning systems, and stream gauges. As reported by the TWDB in January 2025, the FIF is five times over-subscribed, demonstrating a \$2 billion demand for critical projects across the state. We urge you to prioritize appropriating funds directly to the FIF, as this is essential for turning the State Flood Plan's more than 4,000 potential solutions into action and ensuring that the significant investment in planning pays off by protecting lives and property.

To truly safeguard Texans from the increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather, it is essential that we move beyond policy discussions to actively implement the State Flood Plan's recommendations, provide robust funding for the FIF, and integrate the lessons learned from Houston's extensive disaster experience. Thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact Guadalupe Fernandez at guadalupe@bayoucitywaterkeeper.org or Usman Mahmood at usman@bayoucitywaterkeeper.org with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

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