

ICYMI: FEMA Hosts Third Annual Civil Rights Summit

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WASHINGTON -- FEMA hosted its third annual civil rights summit on Nov. 29 and 30, assembling a diverse and experienced lineup of speakers from both the federal family and community organizations to discuss integrating civil rights into our work.

In addition to speakers from FEMA, presenters included representatives from nonprofit, federal and academic organizations such as the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the American Red Cross, Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, University of South Carolina School of Law, FEMA's National Tribal Affairs Advocate and the City of Philadelphia Fire Commissioner, among others. A full list of speakers is available [here](#).

During the summit, presenters shared their wealth of knowledge and information gleaned from their areas of expertise and personal experiences, while speakers from FEMA focused specifically on how the agency is working to make civil rights a priority in the work it does now and into the future.

“We are on a mission at FEMA to honor and build upon the decades-long and heroic work of our nation’s civil rights leaders to advance equity and justice for all,” said **FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell**. “That’s why we believe it’s not enough to simply increase equity during and after disasters; we must get help to all people, in all communities, well before disaster strikes.”

“Underserved communities are often hit the hardest by disasters and other hazards, worsening inequities already present in society. Continuing to ignore the needs of underserved communities will only propagate cycles of inequity, which can lead to attitudes of mistrust and despair,” said **FEMA Deputy Administrator Erik A. Hooks**. “This summit underscores FEMA’s commitment to breaking this cycle through instilling equity and civil rights as a foundation of emergency management.”



“I am incredibly grateful to our civil rights and community partners, as well my FEMA and emergency management family, for attending and participating in today’s summit,” said **FEMA’s Office of Equal Rights Director Leslie Saucedo**. “It’s a demonstration of our shared desire to grow and improve how we serve the public following a disaster, on what many describe as their worst day.”

“Asian Americans Advancing Justice -- AAJC is encouraged by FEMA’s equity focus on its new strategic plan and emergency management activities because it is imperative that communities of color, immigrant families and underserved communities are treated with equity, dignity and respect during natural disasters,” said **Asian Americans Advancing Justice -- AAJC’s President and Executive Director, John C. Yang**. “We strongly advocate for FEMA to develop multi-language resources and culturally competent services for Asian American communities, which has more than 100 languages and 50 different ethnicities, to ensure that our communities are not at a disadvantage when danger strikes.”

“I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to have spoken at FEMA’s Civil Rights Summit alongside such esteemed panelists and colleagues,” said **the Trevor Project’s Director of Advocacy and Government Affairs Preston Mitchum**. “In serving a community as diverse and unique as the LGBTQI+ community, we at The Trevor Project understand the critical importance of prioritizing equity and intersectionality across every aspect of our work. I look forward to continue working with FEMA and other community partners to build on the important discussions from today and advance equity and access to culturally competent mental health crisis care across the nation.”

Topics of discussion at the summit included civil rights and housing inequities; how intersectionality creates patterns of discrimination in our civil rights system; the disenfranchisement and vulnerabilities of underserved communities in civil rights; and the community, FEMA and emergency management.

The summit builds on the three-part series hosted in the fall of 2020 and the one-day event in the fall of 2021 by raising awareness of FEMA’s programs and civil rights efforts. The prior two summits focused on civil rights, accessibility to FEMA programs, prioritizing equity and civil rights and creating an inclusive, community-based approach to emergency management and disaster response and recovery.



The summit also further emphasizes FEMA’s commitment to instilling equity as a foundation of emergency management, as outlined in the agency’s [2022-2026 FEMA Strategic Plan](#) released in January. To achieve this goal, FEMA has prioritized equity and civil rights to make its assistance more “survivor-centric,” our eligibility requirements less rigid and its outreach more mindful of the unique communities it serves by:

- Creating dual-language advertising campaigns to educate and remind residents of flood preparedness.
- Creating an expedited process for mitigation grant selections and assistance.
- Making a significant commitment to underserved communities by expanding BRIC funding in 2023 to \$2 billion.
- Changing the documentation to prove homeownership factored in homeowners who had inherited properties with no formal deed.

To read more about the 2022-2026 FEMA Strategic Plan, please visit [here](#).

For more information about FEMA’s External Civil Rights Division, how to submit a civil rights complaint, the Civil Rights cadre, and to download the Civil Rights Anti-Discrimination Flyer, go to [External Civil Rights Division | FEMA.gov](#). Contact the Office of Equal Rights at 833-285-7448, 711 or Video Relay Services (VRS), or FEMA-CivilRightsOffice@fema.dhs.gov.

