

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3203

July 9, 2025

The Honorable Kristi Noem
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr Ave SE
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Noem:

I write to urge you to swiftly reinstate the \$3 million Department of Homeland Security (DHS) grant supporting the Exploiting Mesonets for Emergency Preparedness and Response to Weather Extremes (EMPOWER) project. DHS Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) has partnered with the University at Albany (UAlbany) since 2023 to build out a better, more accurate weather hazard impact warning and emergency response capability to keep New Yorkers—and ultimately the nation—safe. Until yesterday, the project focused on extreme weather, such as rapid and severe flooding, similar to what communities in Central Texas are tragically dealing with today, and any funding that is rescinded or stalled could put lives at risk.

Just last week, you acknowledged in remarks that “everybody wants more warning time, and that's why we're working to upgrade the technologies that have been neglected for far too long, to make sure that families have as much advanced notice as possible.” This project – a regional pilot with the potential to be deployed nationwide – does just that. It has been considered highly successful by DHS S&T, already having significant operational impact. Co-developed with the NY Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services (among many other engaged end-users), the EMPOWER prototype extreme weather decision support dashboard is currently operational within the New York State Office of Emergency Management Watch Center. Furthermore, the project has brought direct access to high fidelity, real-time weather data covering all of New York State to the FEMA Geospatial Response Office for the first time.

The New York State Mesonet is a network of 127 weather stations across the state that supplement National Weather Service modeling and observations to provide more accurate and real-time weather information, helping improve forecasts and inform weather alerts. The EMPOWER project utilizes the Mesonet's real-time data to develop cutting-edge tools designed specifically for emergency managers and first responders. In a world with increasingly frequent and unpredictable severe weather, these new tools will provide our community safety professionals with unparalleled information to make the fastest, most well-informed decisions when disasters strike, helping to alert communities of imminent threats and better protect lives and property.

The EMPOWER program exemplifies a successful partnership between researchers, higher education, emergency managers, and the Federal government. This program has tangible outcomes – emergency alert systems greatly benefit the public and upgrading our technology is necessary to mitigate risk and loss of life when disaster strikes. I cannot underline how important this program is to New York's emergency response, as well as to the entire Nation. As our researchers better develop emergency management technology, we can count on the

implementation of this technology across America in the near future to save lives. Not only does the public benefit, but improved emergency warning system technology and data about weather events helps our first responders, who put their lives on the line for their communities, better determine the risk to the area they serve. This \$3 million grant is essential to supporting the completion of this vital work.

In the wake of the devastating flooding in Texas we have a responsibility to do everything we can to mitigate the risks of extreme weather and ensure that tragedies like this never happen again. The federal government should be investing in better technologies to improve hazard impact warning systems and provide emergency managers more timely and accurate information to ensure they can put out emergency alerts and evacuation orders to save lives and take other crucial actions to protect community lifelines. Cancelling this grant does exactly the opposite, and stifles emerging tools and technologies that have the potential to save lives.

I urge you to reinstate the \$3 million DHS EMPOWER grant to support the project and its researchers so they can deliver groundbreaking technology to save Americans from avoidable weather-related harm. Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. Please do not hesitate to contact my staff if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Charles E. Schumer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Charles" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Schumer".

Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator