

February 25, 2019

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Democratic Leader
U.S. Senate

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Senator Schumer, and Leader McCarthy:

As Congress considers legislation to revitalize our nation's infrastructure, we urge that these investments require the application of the latest building codes and standards.

In January, the congressionally-established National Institute of Building Sciences (NIBS) released a study finding that adopting modern model building codes saves \$11 for every \$1 invested through earthquake, flood, and wind mitigation benefits, with a \$4 to \$1 wildfire mitigation benefit. These benefits represent avoided casualties, property damage, business interruptions, and insurance costs, and are enjoyed by all building stakeholders – from developers, titleholders, and lenders, to tenants and communities. The study quantifies the tangible benefits we see every year following natural disasters. Just this past year, modern codes ensured that buildings in Alaska sustained minimal damage following the Port MacKenzie earthquake. In Florida, following Hurricane Michael, buildings designed and constructed to modern codes fared far better than buildings built to older codes and standards.

After receiving unanimous support in committee, the 115th Congress, through the Bipartisan Budget Act and the Disaster Recovery Reform Act, approved measures that promote the adoption and application of modern building codes, highlighting their importance in stemming the rising costs of disaster recovery. Federal agencies have also recognized these benefits. FEMA conditions funding to repair and rebuild public buildings after a disaster on the applicant's adherence to the latest building codes. The Agency adopted this policy to "protect lives and property," which, consequently, "reduc[es] the need for future Federal disaster recovery grants and other assistance." HUD has similarly required CDBG-DR applicants document their commitment to supporting the adoption of modern, resilient, building codes. And GSA requires that federal buildings adhere to the latest codes.

The federal government uses and promotes modern codes and standards, but states and localities determine their adoption and application, which, correspondingly, varies state by state and jurisdiction by jurisdiction. This means that, absent minimum standards, the safety and resilience requirements for federally supported infrastructure investments would vary considerably. Five states representing 12% of the population have state building codes that are 9 or more years old and, where local governments determine code adoption, upwards of 25% and 10% of residents in some Midwest and Gulf Coast states, respectively, live in communities on codes that are just as dated. This variation leads to real-world ramifications. Modern building codes require storm shelters for schools in tornado prone regions. Yet of the 21 states that regularly face tornado risk, just 8 require tornado shelters for schools.

Schools, housing, hospitals, shelters, and other public buildings and amenities are all pillars of our communities and especially important in meeting the needs of vulnerable populations. Many of these buildings frequently serve communities as emergency shelters, which requires these facilities be resilient and well maintained. Ensuring they are constructed to modern codes protects the people who use and occupy these structures as well as the federal government's own investment, is consistent with FEMA and HUD policy, and tracks the federal government's requirements for its own buildings. To do otherwise, locks avoidable risk into investments with lifetimes spanning 50 to 75 years, or more.

Modernizing our nation's buildings is a critical part of infrastructure revitalization. Requiring application of the latest codes ensures this needed investment is well made.

Sincerely,

Alliance for National and Community Resilience
Alliance to Save Energy
American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy
American Institute of Architects
American Society of Civil Engineers
American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers
American Society of Interior Designers
Association of State Floodplain Managers
Congressional Fire Services Institute
Covestro LLC
Electrical Safety Foundation International
Environmental and Energy Study Institute
EPDM Roofing
Illuminating Engineering Society
Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety
International Association of Arson Investigators
International Association of Fire Chiefs
International Association of Fire Fighters
International Code Council
Knauf Insulation
Mason Contractors Association of America
National Association of State Energy Officials
National Concrete Masonry Association
National Electrical Manufacturers Association
National Fire Protection Association
National Ready Mixed Concrete Association
Natural Hazards Center at the University of Colorado Boulder
North American Insulation Manufacturers Association
Polyisocyanurate Insulation Manufacturers Association
Portland Cement Association
RCI, Inc.
Reinsurance Association of America
Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors National Association
U.S. Resiliency Council
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