

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3203

July 7, 2025

Duane Townsend  
Acting Inspector General  
Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Acting Inspector General Townsend:

Following the disastrous and deeply devastating flash flooding in Texas this weekend, I write to urge you to immediately to open an investigation into the scope, breadth, and ramifications of whether staffing shortages at key local National Weather Service (NWS) stations contributed to the catastrophic loss of life and property during the deadly flooding.

My heart breaks for the at least 78 people — including at least 21 children — who have died as of this writing, the many others who remain missing, and all people impacted by this tragedy. Many of the victims were swept away in the early morning hours of July 4 as flash floods devastated Kerr County and the surrounding region, including a private summer camp.

This is a national tragedy which people across the country are mourning. The American people deserve answers.

According to [The New York Times](#) (*NYT*), key forecasting and coordination positions at the NWS offices responsible for this region — including the San Antonio and San Angelo offices — were vacant at the time of the storm. These included a warning coordination meteorologist, a science officer, hydrologist and other vital forecasting, meteorology, and coordination roles. *NYT* further reports that the vacancy rate at many NWS offices nationwide has roughly doubled since President Trump returned to office — due in part to a wave of early retirements encouraged by the administration and a freeze on hiring.

The roles left unfilled are not marginal, they're critical. These are the experts responsible for modeling storm impacts, monitoring rising water levels, issuing flood warnings, and coordinating directly with local emergency managers about when to warn the public and issue evacuation orders. To put it plainly: they help save lives.

As those impacted begin to mourn their catastrophic loss and start to rebuild their communities we must do everything possible to provide answers as to why the community was not alerted sooner that dangerously high floodwaters were imminent — both to bring some semblance of peace to those impacted and to insure we do everything within our power to make sure it doesn't ever happen again across the US.

I urge your office to immediately investigate whether the staffing shortfalls at NWS offices in Texas — and across the country — played a role in exacerbating the impact of this deadly flooding event. Specifically, I ask that your office examine the following:

1. Did the staffing vacancies at the San Antonio and San Angelo NWS stations contribute to delays, gaps, or diminished accuracy in forecasts related to the July 4 flooding?
2. Did those vacancies delay or weaken the issuance of flood warnings or other extreme weather alerts?
3. Did reduced staffing impede the NWS' ability to coordinate with local emergency officials, including in Kerr County? If so, what impact did this have on public evacuation orders or emergency response?
4. Which specific positions were vacant in the San Antonio and San Angelo offices as of July 4 and what are the core responsibilities of those roles? Why are they vacant? And how long have they been vacant?
5. If these positions remain vacant, is NWS' San Antonio office adequately equipped to issue timely and accurate forecasts and warnings to help save lives in a future extreme weather event?
6. Would restoring staffing levels improve the agency's capacity to issue timely, accurate forecasts and coordinate with emergency managers in at-risk regions?
7. Are the San Antonio and San Angelo NWS offices — or any others currently understaffed — operationally equipped to provide timely and accurate warnings for future severe weather events?
8. What is the current vacancy rate across NWS forecasting offices nationwide, and what risks do these vacancies pose to public safety?
9. Have internal assessments or risk briefings been conducted warning of the impact of degraded staffing on operations or public safety? If so, were those warnings shared with NOAA leadership, the Commerce Department, the White House, Congress or any of the above?

To honor the lives of those lost, we have a responsibility to the American people to determine whether preventable failures contributed to this tragedy — and to ensure that it never happens again.

Thank you for your urgent attention to this matter. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Schumer  
Democratic Leader