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# GAO REPORT HIGHLIGHTS IMPORTANCE OF ENHANCED DISASTER RESILIENCE

WASHINGTON – Today, a bipartisan group of senators highlighted a report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) (<http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-15-515>) that examines federal agencies' efforts to enhance disaster resilience during the Hurricane Sandy recovery process. The report, requested by Sens. Tom Carper (D-Del.), Ron Johnson (R-Wis.), Jack Reed (D-RI), and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), highlights the importance of enhancing disaster resilience in order to better protect American families, businesses, and communities against future extreme weather events. In the report, GAO recommends the establishment of an investment strategy to identify, prioritize, and guide future federal investments in disaster resilience and hazard mitigation.

**Sen. Tom Carper:** “Our nation’s ability to withstand and recover from devastating storms such as Hurricane Katrina and Superstorm Sandy depends on communities being prepared and resilient. The increase in intensity and frequency of extreme weather events comes at a high price to our country – not only in lives impacted – but also in economic terms. I often say that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, and this report reiterates that maxim. By investing in resilience measures, we can prevent damage and mitigate financial risks to our communities and taxpayers when a strong storm hits. As this report reveals, a number of state and local governments are focusing their rebuilding efforts on resilience and prudent, targeted investments that will go a long way in saving both lives and taxpayer dollars. Federal agencies should continue

coordinating with local and state officials in these efforts, and moving forward, come up with a comprehensive strategic approach to prioritizing and implementing investments for disaster resilience in order to better protect our communities from extreme weather events.”

**Sen. Ron Johnson:** “Nearly three years after Hurricane Sandy made landfall, its victims are still suffering its consequences—largely because federal agencies have mismanaged federal disaster resiliency funds. This report highlights the need for a new strategy to ensure federal funds dispersed for disaster resiliency are used efficiently to prepare for and respond to disasters. The victims of Hurricane Sandy—and disasters yet to come—deserve better. Federal agencies must ensure that assistance goes to those who need it most and that the billions of taxpayer dollars spent on these programs are put to good use.”

**Sen. Jack Reed:** “We must help communities that have been hit by natural disasters and severe weather recover and become more resilient. Instead of waiting for the next catastrophe to hit, the federal government should actively work with states and local partners to identify and invest in resiliency planning.”

**Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse:** “The terrible toll of Hurricane Sandy and the massive clean-up that followed remind us of the dire need for smart storm planning. As climate change drives sea levels ever-higher and loads the dice for more severe weather, this report shows that investing our resources wisely can lower risks and costs and ultimately help us build more resilient communities.”

To conduct the report, GAO assessed five federal programs that funded disaster resilience projects throughout the Hurricane Sandy recovery process – the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) Public Assistance Program and Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, the Federal Transit Administration’s Emergency Relief Program, the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Relief, and the U.S Army Corps of Engineers’ Hurricane Sandy Program.

In its biennial High Risk List (<http://www.gao.gov/assets/670/668415.pdf>) released in February, GAO identified the financial impacts of climate change – including increasing intensity and frequency of high-impact weather events – as a certain and significant area of risk leading to government inefficiency, waste, fraud, abuse or mismanagement. GAO reports that enhancing resilience can curb the high costs of climate change by reducing the risk of future damage from extreme weather and natural hazards.

