

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

The Honorable Jeh Johnson  
Secretary of Homeland Security  
301 7th Street Southwest  
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Secretary Johnson,

I write to you today regarding the Las Vegas urban area Relative Risk Profile issued by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI). I appreciate your attention to this matter.

As you well know, with guidance from Congress, FEMA has developed a comprehensive formula to rank the risk of terror threat in each urban area for the UASI program. Over the years, I have appreciated the opportunity to work with FEMA to ensure this formula accurately depicts the vulnerability, threat, and consequence of a terrorist attack for cities being considered under this program. However, in reviewing your recent draft of the Relative Risk Profile, I am disappointed that Las Vegas' risk profile ranking dropped and am extremely concerned that the formula does not properly account for concerns that may unfairly disadvantage the Las Vegas/Paradise Metropolitan Statistical Area.

Firstly, in light of recent terrorist activity and the increasing threat posed by groups like the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, the UASI program is more important now than ever to assist metropolitan areas like Las Vegas that are uniquely at risk. Ensuring the program's formula and especially the "Threat Component" is constantly reevaluated to make certain it is effectively evaluating terror threats from international and domestic terrorists is essential to the safety of our nation. As I stated in my last letter in November 2015, I respectfully urge the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to revisit the Threat Level within the Threat Index and provide clear guidance as to what contributes to this component.

Secondly, Las Vegas hosts many special events and conventions that draw millions of visitors annually, both domestically and internationally. Recently, the Las Vegas urban area had 153 Special Event Assessment Rating (SEAR) catalogued activities, ranging from New Year's Eve Celebrations to NASCAR races. Due to the targeting of special events by terrorist groups, accounting for the number, size, and magnitude of special events and their respective weight within the existing formula would help to more accurately depict the true level of risk.

Thirdly, the Risk Profile considers Level 1 and Level 2 Assets as part of its assessment of both the Vulnerability and Consequence Component. Unfortunately, the Las Vegas strip is "clustered" and continues to be considered one asset, which underrepresents the critical infrastructure count for Level II's and the vulnerability score for targeted infrastructure. As I've stated in my previous correspondence, I strongly encourage DHS to consider each critical

infrastructure along the Las Vegas Strip on its own merit rather than “clustering” the entire area into one asset.

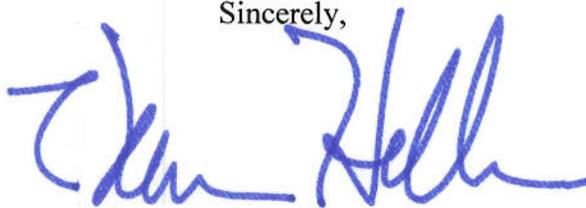
Finally, in the interest of transparency and better understanding of how FEMA calculates each city’s rankings, I respectfully request answers to the following questions regarding the Risk Profile.

1. Given that the Las Vegas Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) risk profile ranking dropped from the 24<sup>th</sup> spot in Fiscal Year 2015 to 29<sup>th</sup> in Fiscal Year 2016, I respectfully request that you provide a detailed explanation as to how DHS determined this ranking. Please also include an explanation of what specific factors resulted in Las Vegas being ranked lower compared to the prior fiscal year.
2. What data does DHS use to determine SEAR activities? Does DHS take into consideration the presence of public figures at special events?
3. In the past, has DHS revised their draft risk rankings after the initial comment period and receiving input from stakeholders? If so, can you explain this process?
4. How do special events factor into the risk ranking?
5. Does DHS consider international publications when assessing the Threat Component of the Risk Profile?
6. Recognizing that DHS also uses a private firm to assess visitor data within the Consequence Component, has this vendor provided FEMA updated, current data for use in this most recent Risk Profile?

Ensuring that Las Vegas has the resources it needs to combat potential threats is critical. I appreciate the opportunity to bring these concerns with the formula to your attention and encourage FEMA to take into consideration the unique challenges that Las Vegas, as a premier tourist destination, poses in the ongoing efforts to prevent terror attacks in the U.S.

Thank you for the opportunity to write to you today. I look forward to your response to this inquiry by January 22, 2016.

Sincerely,



DEAN HELLER  
U.S. Senator