May 9, 2024

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Chair, Committee on Commerce, Science, & Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Subject: EERI supports the continued funding of the National Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program through TWERA

Dear Senator Cantwell:

The Earthquake Engineering Research Institute (EERI) requests your support to ensure continued funding of the National Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program (NTHMP), an important piece of the Tsunami Warning, Education, and Research Act (TWERA).

EERI is an international, nonprofit society of experts dedicated to reducing earthquake risk. We advocate for comprehensive and realistic measures for reducing the destructive effects of earthquakes and their related phenomena, including tsunamis. EERI recently published a policy position statement about promoting comprehensive tsunami risk management in the United States. EERI membership includes professionals in a wide range of seismic safety-related scientific and design disciplines, including but not limited to architects, planners, social scientists, seismologists, structural engineers, geotechnical engineers, and public policy professionals, many of whom are proud Washington residents.

The NTHMP typically provides $6M/year in partner grant funding to 27 US states and territories at risk of tsunamis. Past partner grants have supported local tsunami education programs, tsunami alerting, hazard modeling, evacuation, mitigation, and recovery planning, among other initiatives. This year (FY24), only $4M has been allocated for NTHMP partner grants, straining the ability of the program to maintain its important work. Next year (FY25), the NTHMP has been zeroed out in President Biden’s budget and NOAA’s blue book, effectively eliminating the program. Reduction or elimination of the NTHMP will critically hamper the efforts of states, tribal governments, and territories to improve Tsunami Design Zone maps and standards used in building codes.

In FY24, NOAA allocated $2M for upgrades to the two Tsunami Warning Centers (TWCs), a need identified by the NOAA Science Advisory Board (SAB) Tsunami Science and Technology Advisory Panel (TSTAP). However, the recommendations were not intended to divert funding away from the NTHMP partner grant program. Importantly, upgrades to the TWCs will only improve forecasting of distant-source tsunamis and do not support community preparations for life-threatening tsunamis from...
local source events like the Cascadia subduction zone. These efforts are largely undertaken through the NTHMP partner grants.

As an internationally recognized authority on seismic engineering and safety for more than 70 years, EERI strongly urges you to (1) support H.R. 6093 to reauthorize the 2017 Tsunami Warning, Education, and Research Act (TWERA), recently passed by the US House of Representatives, and (2) to petition NOAA to fully fund ($6M) the NTHMP partner grants program in FY24 and FY25, which will help address tsunami evacuation tower mitigation efforts and other State activities.

We are grateful for your leadership in tsunami safety initiatives, including your introduction of TWERA as a part of the Weather Research and Forecasting Innovation Act in 2017. Your continued support of TWERA and the NTHMP will provide an important opportunity to protect tens of thousands of people from Cascadia tsunamis. Thank you for considering EERI's position on this important seismic safety issue.

Sincerely,

Janiele Maffei
EERI President

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