

JUDY CHU, Ph.D.
28TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA
WASHINGTON D.C. OFFICE:
2423 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
(202) 225-5464
(202) 225-5467 (Fax)
PASADENA DISTRICT OFFICE:
527 South Lake Avenue, Suite 250
Pasadena, CA 91101
(626) 304-0110
(626) 304-0132 (Fax)



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

**COMMITTEE ON
WAYS AND MEANS**
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
WORKER AND FAMILY SUPPORT
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT
**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
THE BUDGET**

September 29, 2025

Board of Supervisors
County of Los Angeles
500 West Temple Street
Room 383
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: L.A. County Wildfires Independent After-Action Review

Dear Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors,

I write in advance of the Board's motion to adopt and implement the recommendations of the January 2025 Eaton and Palisades Fire Independent After-Action Review. I support this motion, as the report provides important insight into the systemic failures that contributed to evacuation delays and outlines urgently needed reforms. At the same time, I request that the County address unresolved questions, particularly why West Altadena residents, who suffered the greatest losses, did not receive the timely warnings and response they so desperately needed and deserved.

The Eaton Fire was the second most destructive fire in California's history, taking the lives of 19 of our neighbors, decimating 9,500 structures, and displacing over 20,000 people throughout Altadena and Pasadena. But it was West Altadena that was hit hardest, with 18 of the 19 deaths occurring in this community. Yet the Independent After-Action Review mentions these individuals only once. Their lives should be at the forefront of this report, and I therefore request that the County conduct a more comprehensive account and analysis of how these deaths occurred and what specific actions officials could have taken to prevent them.

After the fire broke out, residents east of Lake Avenue were told to evacuate as early as 7:26 p.m. Yet residents west of Lake Avenue, where the greatest loss of life occurred, did not receive an evacuation alert until 3:25 a.m. With no warnings, many people went to bed or waited too long to arrange help if they were physically unable to leave on their own. Concerningly, the report acknowledges that the first 911 call reporting a fire in West Altadena – in an area where structural damage was subsequently confirmed – was received just before 1:00am on January 8th, more than two hours before the evacuation order was issued. Despite verified calls for help from this region and visible dangers, the report does not explain why officials concluded it was safe to wait until 3:25 a.m. to issue the order, or who was responsible for that decision. This highlights the urgent need to clarify and document evacuation authority so there is no ambiguity about who has the power to act and how quickly warnings must be delivered.

The report also describes two instances where officials recommended evacuation orders for West Altadena to their Unified Command, but in both cases, those recommendations were either not recalled or poorly documented. These gaps leave an incomplete record of how decisions were made in real time and underscore the need for stronger training, planning, and recordkeeping protocols to ensure that recommendations are properly documented, reviewed, and acted upon.

Further, the report highlights that many residents never received warnings of danger because alerts required residents to opt in beforehand or click a link to see the full message. Warnings must be immediate, automatic, and complete, and requiring residents to sign up in advance or navigate multiple steps during a fire puts lives even further at risk. This underscores the importance of modernizing situational awareness, improving interoperability among agencies, and strengthening community engagement so alerts are reliable and accessible to all.

It is possible that an Office of Emergency Management could have addressed these issues before these tragic fires. That is why it is disturbing that this office, which is in charge of the safety of the 10 million people of Los Angeles County, is severely understaffed and undertrained.

I strongly urge the County to fully implement the recommendations outlined in this report, but also address the above unresolved questions. The County must clarify evacuation authority and documentation, strengthen training and coordination across agencies, and address resource shortfalls by filling vacancies, updating equipment, and ensuring adequate staffing. It must also modernize situational awareness and interoperability so all agencies share real-time data, and improve public communication so warnings are immediate, automatic, and accessible without opt-ins or extra steps during an emergency. These are lifesaving measures that must be implemented with urgency and accountability.

Should the Board adopt this report, I request that the County provide regular updates on its progress in implementing these recommendations so that the public can have confidence that these systemic failures are being addressed in a timely and transparent manner. We owe it to the victims, survivors, and their families to ensure that these evacuation delays and failures are never repeated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Judy Chu". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Judy Chu
Member of Congress