

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 13, 2026

The Honorable Kenneth Graham  
Director  
National Weather Service  
1325 East West Highway  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Director Graham:

On Friday, March 6, 2026, a tornadic storm devastated southwestern Michigan, claiming the lives of four people. This fatal storm produced four separate tornadoes – an EF-1 tornado in Cass County, an EF-2 tornado in St. Joseph County, an EF-3 tornado in Branch County, and, finally, an EF-0 tornado in Calhoun County. The Branch County tornado, which reached max wind speeds of 160mph, was the strongest tornado to hit Michigan in nearly fifty years.

We mourn for those who lost their lives to this storm, and we stand fully prepared to work with the impacted families and communities to begin the process of rebuilding and recovering. At the same time, we seek to better understand how this tragic event unfolded and what changes are required to better protect public safety and avoid such tragic loss of life during future extreme weather events. With that in mind, we ask for written answers to the following questions within 30 days of receipt of this letter:

- It has been reported that the National Weather Service (NWS) did not issue a tornado watch alert ahead of the March 6 tornadic storm. Why was no such alert issued?
- We understand that tornado watch alerts are typically issued by the Storm Prediction Center after consultation with the local Weather Forecast Office, of which there are five that cover Michigan – Marquette, Gaylord, Grand Rapids, Detroit, and Northern Indiana. How many full-time employees work at each of these five offices? How do these numbers compare to staffing levels in 2024?
- What current staffing vacancies exist at these five offices? What are the primary responsibilities associated with these positions and how long have they been vacant? Do each of these Weather Forecast Offices currently employ a full-time Meteorologist in Charge, Science and Operations Officer, and Warning & Coordination Meteorologist?
- Which NWS offices were responsible for issuing tornado alerts for the impacted regions in Michigan or had staff monitoring the region on March 6?
- Was a lack of staff and/or resources a contributing factor to NWS's inability to issue a tornado watch alert ahead of the March 6 tornadoes? What, if anything, would have allowed the responsible NWS offices to identify the supercell that produced these tornadoes more quickly and, in turn, issue a tornado watch alert ahead of the first

touchdown? In particular, would a gap-filling radar have provided additional data that could have allowed staff to better characterize the threat of the oncoming storm?

- What steps does NWS plan to take in the wake of this fatal storm to improve the accuracy of its weather forecasting and prediction as well as the timeliness of its tornado alerts? What additional authorities and/or funding could Congress provide to facilitate such improvements?

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



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Gary C. Peters

United States Senator



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Elissa Slotkin

United States Senator