

Prepared Testimony of Andreanecia Morris

U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources — Insurance
Affordability and Climate Risk

Chair, Ranking Member, and members of the Committee: thank you for the opportunity to testify on insurance affordability and the growing climate risk that is driving this crisis across the country. My name is Andreanecia Morris. I work with communities in Louisiana that are trying to stay in their homes, protect their families, and recover—again and again—from disasters that are becoming more frequent and more expensive.

Louisiana is often described as a canary in the coal mine for climate impacts. But today, I want to be clear: what's happening to homeowners AND renters in Louisiana is not a regional anomaly—it is a warning light for the whole nation. When insurance becomes unaffordable or unavailable, it destabilizes household finances, weakens local economies, and undermines our ability to recover after disasters.

Let me ground this in one homeowner's experience. Ms. Jane, as we'll call her, is an elderly retiree who has lived in her home for 15 years. She did what we tell people to do: buy a modest home, pay the mortgage, and plan for retirement. But after Hurricane Ida in September 2021, her monthly mortgage payment became a moving target—not because her principal changed, but because insurance costs exploded inside her escrow.

Between 2021 and 2023, Ms. Jane's monthly escrow payment went from \$318.34 to \$1,639.40—a 414% increase—while her monthly principal stayed the same. No retiree can absorb that kind of jump on a fixed income. She had to make choices between keeping insurance, buying medicine, fixing her car, or helping family. Even though mitigation brought costs down later, the damage was already done. Now Ms. Jane has accumulated a past-due escrow balance of \$19,090 because the period of unaffordability lasted so long.

This story contains two truths we have to hold at the same time. First: mitigation works. Ms. Jane installed a fortified roof in September 2023, and by 2025 her escrow is down to \$184.23. Second: families need help *before* the crisis pushes them into arrears, not after. We cannot treat mitigation as a luxury upgrade when it is becoming basic survival infrastructure.

Insurance is pricing two things at once: the hazards themselves, and the vulnerability of the structures we live in. Decades of underinvestment in resilient construction and retrofits mean many homes are simply not prepared for the reality we are already in. That is why we now have no choice but to make our homes climate-ready—while also addressing the emissions that are worsening these hazards. These are not competing goals. They are the two sides of the same solution.

Across the country, families are facing rising premiums, higher deductibles, policy non-renewals, and shrinking options. When coverage fails, mortgages are threatened, rebuilding stalls, and community institutions—from local contractors to small businesses—feel the shock. These are the not-so-hidden costs of climate change: higher operating costs for households, and systemic instability for entire regions.

In Louisiana, the affordability squeeze is also contributing to population loss. The New Orleans metro area alone has lost roughly 40,000 people. When insurance and housing costs spike, people do not just cut back—they leave. That hollowing out reduces the tax base, strains schools and services, and makes it harder for the people who remain—often elders and low- and moderate-income families—to recover after the next disaster.

In New Orleans, the Housing Trust Fund offers a clear pathway to stabilize costs and reduce climate risk. We led a coalition that secured 75% voter support to dedicate 2% of the city budget annually. By investing in resilience retrofits—like FORTIFIED roofs—families gain safer homes, less storm damage, and greater long-term affordability.

Renters benefit when properties are fortified, especially in small and midsize buildings where costs are often passed on. Trust Fund support can pair resilience investments with affordability requirements and limits on rent increases. For homeowners, the Fund helps close the gap between insurance demands and what families can afford.

Louisiana has taken meaningful—if hard-fought—steps forward. The state has expanded home-hardening efforts, and the Department of Insurance has begun implementing clearer premium discounts for FORTIFIED standards so families who reduce risk can see real savings. But these gains did not come easily. Progress has faced unnecessary delays and opposition—from segments of the insurance industry, from the Commissioner, and from some policymakers not fully aligned with the needs of their constituents.

And still, the impact is clear: when mitigation is real and discounts are real, families can stay in place. But we cannot build a system that requires families to endure years of unaffordable costs before relief arrives.

In closing, insurance affordability and climate resilience are inseparable from housing affordability. With targeted investments and stronger federal action, we can help families stay housed, reduce losses, and stabilize our housing markets.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to your questions.