

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 13, 2023

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden:

We write in strong support of Governor Scott's request for a Major Disaster Declaration to address the devastating effects of catastrophic flooding impacting communities across Vermont and urge you to quickly approve this critical request.

We appreciate the lifesaving work FEMA has done in the days following your approval of the Emergency Declaration on July 10, which has enabled FEMA to work with local first responders to coordinate search and rescue efforts, provide emergency health care, support emergency sheltering needs, and activate mutual aid agreements between states. FEMA's work over the course of this week has been instrumental in saving lives and preventing further damage to homes and property. Following this temporary declaration, a Major Disaster Declaration is needed to support the state's ongoing and future response and recovery needs.

We ask that you approve a Major Disaster Declaration that covers resources from federal agencies, including but not limited to: FEMA's Individual Assistance and Public Assistance Programs, including all categories of Public Assistance and Hazard Mitigation; the Small Business Administration's Disaster Loan Program; and financial assistance and support from the Department of Agriculture, Department of Housing and Urban Development, and Department of Transportation, including emergency response funding. Vermont will simply be unable to recover from this disaster without support from federal agencies to supplement state response programs. We greatly appreciate your offer of support to help Vermont access these resources, as well as those offers from Secretaries Mayorkas and Buttigieg.

In approving the Major Disaster Declaration, we also ask that you work with Vermont through FEMA Administrator Criswell to approve a 100 percent federal cost share for Public Assistance dollars, as well as expedite funding so communities may begin to recover from this disaster as quickly as possible, regardless of their existing resources.

As you know, Vermont is a rural state, with a strong agricultural footprint and significant generationally-held land. We also have extremely low housing stock. Put together, this results in many Vermonters who will struggle to provide documentation of land deeds or permanent housing. Therefore, we strongly support the Governor's request for flexibility from your administration in equitably assisting our most vulnerable individuals statewide.

As underscored in the governor's request, beginning on July 9th, Vermont experienced severe flash foods, which continued for several days. The effects have been nothing short of catastrophic:

- Local first responders have conducted more than 200 water rescues, including the rescue of 12 campers in Andover who were stranded when a bridge was washed out
- The Winooski River rose to levels unprecedented since 1927, causing calamitous flooding of downtown Montpelier, our state's capital city.
- Nearly 90 road closures occurred along major routes across the state due to flooding and subsequent infrastructure failures, including washed-away bridges and sinkholes. As much as 9.05 inches of rain was reported (in Plymouth, Vermont), with a number of other towns in southern and central Vermont getting seven or more inches of precipitation (including Ludlow, Weston, Bridgewater Center, Barre, Montpelier and Morrisville). There are 14 boil water and do not drink advisories are currently in place.
- Numerous dams in the state have been rendered potentially structurally unsound, and others' reservoirs have reached near capacity:
  - The Lyons Pond Dam has already failed with the contents flowing into Burnt Meadow Brook toward Londonderry.
  - Three state-owned flood control dams on the Winooski River – Waterbury, Wrightsville, and East Barre – are being monitored very closely by the state and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. In particular, the Wrightsville Dam has been dangerously near capacity; its reservoir only one foot below the action level, additional rainfall may create serious flooding and could cause structural damage.
- Multiple wastewater treatment plants are inoperable, including at least one that has been completely destroyed.
- 200 miles of rail and six rail bridges in the state-owned rail system were damaged.

As officials in Vermont continue to assess the ongoing damage, they are also preparing for additional rain in the coming days, which include predictions of flash floods. This has the potential to exacerbate problems in areas that have already experienced flooding, as well as those which are down stream and still dealing with the impact of cresting rivers and high water.

We are grateful for your administration's support and urge a prompt approval of the Governor's Major Disaster Declaration request—along with any other necessary assistance requests—so that the state and individuals impacted by the floods can begin to plan recovery efforts.

There is much that remains unknown about how Vermont will rebuild and recover from the ongoing floods, but we are confident that, with your support, Vermonters will come through this terrible tragedy.

Sincerely,



BERNARD SANDERS  
United States Senator



PETER WELCH  
United States Senator



BECCA BALINT  
Member of Congress