

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 30, 2024

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Johnson, Minority Leader Jeffries, Chair Murray, Chairman Cole, Vice Chair Collins, and Ranking Member DeLauro,

As Vermont continues to recover from July 2023's catastrophic flooding—and responds to flooding that again hit the state three weeks ago—we once again urge you to pass federal funding that meets the needs of our state, with a significant focus on funding for long-term disaster recovery and mitigation work.

This funding is even more critical as the state works to respond to the impacts of severe flooding across northern and central Vermont caused by remnants of Hurricane Beryl, which struck our state exactly one year after so many homes, businesses, farms, and communities were destroyed by the worst flooding Vermont has experienced in nearly a century. More than five inches of rain fell in numerous towns, with the town of Walden receiving 7.25 inches of precipitation. This intense rainfall over a short period of time damaged railways, destroyed crops, and washed away roads, bridges, and culverts. It also damaged—and in some cases, completely destroyed—homes, farms, and businesses, particularly in Plainfield and Lyndon. Some of these homes had suffered serious damage in July 2023. Swift water teams rescued 118 people from homes and vehicles, and sadly, two Vermonters lost their lives. While precipitation from this storm was more localized than it was in July 2023, the impacts were still severe across northern and central Vermont—including Addison, Chittenden, Washington, Orange, Caledonia, and Essex counties.

We are most appreciative of President Biden's revised request for additional supplemental disaster relief funding, which builds off of his October 2023 request for disaster aid. Specifically, we support President Biden's requests for increased funding for the Department of

Transportation's Emergency Relief Program (DOT-ER), the Housing and Urban Development's Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery Program (CDBG-DR), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Disaster Relief Fund (DRF). Supplemental funding for these programs will be critical to Vermont's recovery.

Specifically, the President's request of an additional \$3.1 billion for DOT-ER can help Vermont repair much-needed infrastructure. One year ago, Vermont experienced nearly a month of flash flooding that required more than 200 swift water rescues and 70 evacuations. Flooding closed nearly 90 roads along major routes and caused damage to more than 200 miles of the state-owned rail system.

HUD's CDBG-DR program can provide support for the thousands of homes and hundreds of businesses that reported damages from the July 2023 floods. Vermont did not have sufficient housing stock prior to the flooding event, which posed a considerable challenge for the more than 5,000 individuals and families whose shelter was impacted by the disaster. Furthermore, many homeowners, including manufactured housing residents whose homes were destroyed during the storm, have received only a fraction of the funding needed to acquire sufficient housing. According to one HUD estimate, Vermont alone will require \$184 million in CDBG-DR funding to fully address damage from the July 2023 floods. In order to invest in safe and affordable housing that is resilient to future disasters, Congress must provide robust supplemental funding for the CDBG-DR program.

Replenishing FEMA's DRF is also essential to Vermont's recovery, as well as the state's investments in mitigation activities to build resiliency against future disasters. This funding will play an important role in the state's long-term stability and the fight against global climate change. It will also reduce federal expenditures for inevitable future disasters. FEMA recently announced new rebuilding requirements for states and communities that acknowledge the potential future risks of flooding and climate change. This forward-thinking update will ensure that buildings and infrastructure can withstand natural disasters in the future. However, FEMA needs robust funding in its DRF to adequately respond to disasters across the country.

In addition to the programs referenced in President Biden's revised supplemental request, we urge you to provide additional funding to address 2023 and 2024 agricultural losses in Vermont and across the country. Agriculture is a key part of Vermont's economy, culture, and plan for disaster resiliency. Sustainable agricultural practices on Vermont farms enable local communities to feed themselves when supply chains break down while simultaneously building soils that absorb excess water and resist drought, creating climate resiliency. While the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has standing emergency assistance programs, these programs are designed for larger farms, disadvantaging the kinds of diverse, small-scale agriculture found in Vermont. As a result, Vermont farms have received very little federal flood relief, despite millions of dollars in losses. Additional funding for USDA disaster programming is necessary to meet the needs of farms in our state, and the USDA Emergency Relief Program can provide this critical support.

Furthermore, USDA is uniquely positioned to help rural communities invest in disaster planning, response, and recovery to improve their resilience. The agency's Natural Resources

Conservation Services' (NRCS) Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) offers essential technical and financial assistance to address immediate threats to life and property caused by natural disasters that impair a watershed. Additionally, Rural Development's (RD) Disaster Assistance Fund (DAF) helps RD state and local offices cover costs associated with disaster activity and recovery. We urgently need more funding for EWP to support debris removal and cleanup projects, and for the DAF to address disaster needs quickly and flexibly. Rural communities in Vermont and across the country cannot afford to wait; we must provide supplemental funding now.

Congress must also prioritize funding to help communities in Vermont continue to rebuild their water and wastewater infrastructure. We ask that any supplemental package include funding through the Environmental Protection Agency, Army Corps of Engineers, Great Lakes Fishery Commission, NRCS, and the Department of Energy to help the state bolster its water, wastewater, and dam infrastructure, including funding for evaluating, retrofitting, repairing, and, if necessary, removing dam infrastructure. Waiving all applicable state matching requirements for programs such as the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund programs will also be vital for Vermont's ongoing repair efforts.

We appreciate your support for the appropriation of all additional federal disaster recovery and mitigation dollars that Vermont will need for years to come. Recent data has shown that every dollar spent on flood resiliency efforts saves up to \$318 in flood-related damages. Vermont alone has faced two once-in-a-century floods in less than 20 years. Congress has unfortunately waited and delayed as more disastrous extreme weather has once again destroyed rural communities in Vermont and across America. We cannot wait any longer.

Thank you for your consideration of our request and for your support of Vermont's response and recovery process.

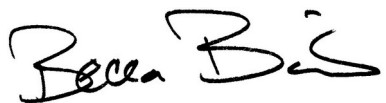
Sincerely,



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Peter Welch
United States Senator



Becca Balint
Member of Congress