

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 4, 2012

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We greatly appreciate all of the efforts your administration has made to address the terrible devastation in Vermont caused by Tropical Storm Irene. We have been especially impressed by the dedication of FEMA staff who responded before the storm even hit, and who have been working shoulder-to-shoulder with Vermonters for the past eight months.

We are proud to report that Vermonters have made significant progress restoring their homes, businesses, farms and communities. However, it is clear that the state government and affected local governments have been stretched to their limits in terms of the financial capacity to recover from this disaster. The scale of the damage to public facilities and infrastructure has been truly overwhelming, particularly for the many small, rural towns that comprise our state.

Consequently, we urge you to approve Governor Shumlin's request to increase the federal cost share for FEMA Public Assistance for Tropical Storm Irene (DR-4022 and EM-3338) from seventy-five percent to ninety percent. Pursuant to 44 CFR 206.47, the federal cost share may be increased to ninety percent for eligible restorative and emergency work under the Stafford Act, when eligible federal obligations exceed a certain per capita threshold.

Not only will Vermont cross that threshold for Tropical Storm Irene, but the total costs may exceed *two times that amount*. There is no question in our minds that Irene is precisely the kind of "extraordinary" event contemplated in §206.47 that warrants increased federal participation in recovery efforts.

Fully 225 of Vermont's 254 towns suffered some damage to municipal infrastructure. Eleven town office buildings, five libraries, seven fire stations and many wastewater and drinking water systems were damaged. Ninety public schools could not open on time. The greatest damage, however, was to local roads and bridges: more than 2,200 washed away, completely isolating thirteen towns for almost a week. Dozens of local roads and bridges are still closed, eight months after the storm.

Some towns have spent several times their annual budgets repairing damaged public infrastructure. For the residents of these towns, the difference between a ten percent and a twenty-five percent non-federal cost share cannot be overstated.

As you know, Tropical Storm Irene was the *fourth* Presidentially-declared major disaster that struck Vermont in a span of just six months. Many of the same towns were struck two, three or even four times by these extreme weather events, further stretching their financial capacity to recover.

Accordingly, we respectfully request that you also approve ninety percent federal cost share for declarations DR-1995, DR-4001 and DR-4043. We understand there have been at least six disasters for which the federal cost share was adjusted to ninety percent even though they did not meet the threshold in 44 CFR 206.47 (Northern Mariana Islands in 2003 and 2005, and four in Florida in 2004). In each case, the state or insular area experienced multiple disasters in a short period of time, creating special conditions that warranted the cost share adjustments.

While the impact on the solvency of the Disaster Relief Fund would be minimal, increasing the federal cost share for these three disasters would be enormously helpful in terms of Vermont's recovery.

We thank you in advance for your expeditious consideration of Governor Shumlin's request for increasing the federal cost share, and we look forward to working with you to ensure Vermont has all the federal resources it needs to help its residents recover from this disaster.

Sincerely,



PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator



BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator



PETER WELCH
United States Representative