

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 9, 2023

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As Vermont continues to respond to, and begins the recovery from, ongoing catastrophic flooding, we urge you to request ample funding from Congress for a disaster supplemental appropriations bill that meets the needs of our state, with a significant focus on funding for long-term disaster response and mitigation work. We ask you to work closely with Congress to move this funding bill expeditiously, so important federal resources for disaster response and recovery become available to states like Vermont as quickly as possible.

Specifically, we ask that your request to Congress include substantial investments in the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Disaster Relief Fund (DRF), particularly the Hazard Mitigation program; the Small Business Administration's (SBA) suite of disaster loan programs; the Economic Development Administration's (EDA) Economic Adjustment Assistance (EAA) Program; and funding through the Departments of Agriculture (USDA), Health and Human Services (HHS), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and Transportation, including Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR), CDBG-Mitigation (CDBG-MIT), Federal Highway Administration Emergency Relief, USDA Emergency Relief Program (USDA-ERP), and all other funding that supports disaster response through the Stafford Act. In addition, we ask that you request funding through the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Army Corps of Engineers, and Department of Energy to help the state rebuild its water, wastewater, and dam infrastructure.

As you know, Vermont experienced severe flash floods beginning on July 7 that have continued to this day. The immediate impacts were nothing short of catastrophic, requiring over 200 water rescues, nearly 90 road closures along major routes, and damage to over 200 miles of rail in the state-owned rail system. We greatly appreciate your support in moving quickly to approve the Major Disaster Declaration and to get Vermont the initial funding needed for immediate response, without which we believe the state would have experienced significantly more destruction.

Unfortunately, the long-term impacts of the disaster are proving to be just as catastrophic, with thousands of homes and hundreds of businesses reporting damage from the floods so significant that they will not be able to recover or rebuild without federal support. In terms of housing, Vermont did not have sufficient housing stock for our population prior to the flooding event, meaning we do not have safe, affordable, available shelter for the more than 4,000 individuals and families impacted by the disaster. Furthermore, many homeowners, including manufactured housing residents, whose homes were destroyed during the storm are receiving only a fraction of the funding needed to acquire new and sufficient housing. In order to safely house Vermonters now, and ensure they have safe and affordable housing that is resilient to future disasters, we request substantial investment in CDBG-DR and MIT funding.

In Vermont, the vast majority of our businesses are defined by SBA as Small Businesses, nearly 80 percent of which are independent contractors or non-employer businesses. These small businesses are the economic engines of our communities, providing our state and others with food, manufactured goods, and tourism opportunities, which is the second-largest component of the state's economy. Therefore, we request sufficient funding for the economic assistance programs within the EDA and the SBA for business physical disaster loans, economic injury disaster loans, and Home and Personal Property Loans.

Farming and rural communities in Vermont also suffered heavy losses. While exact totals are still being calculated, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service shared a report estimating that anywhere between 145,000 and 686,000 acres of agricultural land in the state has been impacted by flooding. While your presidential disaster designation opened up low-interest loans to help farmers bridge the gap, many farmers will struggle to repay the loans. That is why we are also requesting additional funding for USDA-ERP to provide grant-relief in addition to loans.

Water and wastewater infrastructure around the state was severely damaged as well. The wastewater facility in Johnson, Vermont, was completely destroyed and will likely cost upward of \$10 million to replace. Five boil water orders remain in place as of August 8, 2023. In addition, dams across the state were damaged. State inspectors have classified five dams as high hazard and 22 as significant hazards—leaving the state at significant risk for loss of life and property during future storms. We ask that you increase funding through the EPA—including its State Revolving Funds (SRFs) and the Lake Champlain Basin Program—to help the Vermont Agency of Natural Resource rebuild this infrastructure. We also ask that you increase funding through the Army Corps of Engineers, the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, the Department of Energy's Maintaining and Enhancing Hydroelectricity Incentives program, and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Watershed Rehabilitation program to assist in evaluating, retrofitting, repairing, and if necessary removing dam infrastructure.

In addition to Vermont's recovery needs, we urge your administration to support investments in mitigation activities to build resiliency against future disasters in Vermont. This funding, in coordination with recovery dollars, will play an important role in the state's long-term stability, the fight against global climate change, and will reduce federal expenditures for future disasters.

While the damage assessments and needs are ongoing, we appreciate any support you may offer for the authorization and appropriation of all additional federal disaster recovery and mitigation dollars that Vermont will need for years to come.

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

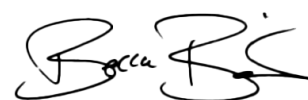
Sincerely,



BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator



PETER WELCH
United States Senator



BECCA BALINT
Member of Congress