

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 11, 2023

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

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

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chair
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker McCarthy, Minority Leader Jeffries, Chairs Murray and Granger, Vice Chair Collins, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As Vermont continues to respond to, and begins the recovery from, ongoing catastrophic flooding, we 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. We ask you to move this funding expeditiously, so important federal resources for disaster response and recovery become available to states like Vermont as quickly as possible.

Specifically, we ask that you include substantial investments in multiple funds to support Vermont's recovery, including but not limited to 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) funding, CDBG – Mitigation (CDBG-MIT) funding, Federal Highway Administration Emergency Relief funding, USDA Emergency Relief Program (USDA-ERP) funding, Legal Services Corporation (LSC) funding, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funding, disaster recovery assistance through the Northern Border Regional Commission

(NBRC), and all other funding that supports disaster response through the Stafford Act. In addition, we ask that you include funding through the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Army Corps of Engineers, and the Department of Energy to help the state rebuild its water, wastewater, and dam infrastructure.

While all of these funding sources will be crucial in the state's recovery process, there are several policy changes that must be made to allow federal agencies to better serve families and businesses in Vermont and nationally. Specifically, we ask that you increase the cap for FEMA funding that can be directed toward hazard mitigation work so that states can be better prepared for future disasters. We also ask that you make SBA disaster loans forgivable so that small businesses, renters, and homeowners don't have to take on additional debt after a disaster. Further, waiving all applicable state matching requirements where appropriate, including for the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund programs, will be vital for Vermont's efforts to be as responsive as possible when repairing flood-related damages. Lastly, we ask that you allow retroactive enrollment in the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program for producers in a disaster area and apply an automatic service fee waiver to better assist farmers.

The flash flooding Vermont experienced from July 7 through August 8 was 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. The initial estimate from the state on the cost of flood-related damages is currently totaling in the many hundreds of millions of dollars.

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 5,000 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 the region 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

have been impacted by flooding. While the President's Major Disaster Declaration opened up low-interest loans to help farmers bridge the gap, many farmers will struggle to repay the loans. That is why we are 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. 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 you 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 your support 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 support of Vermont's response and recovery process.

Sincerely,



BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator



PETER WELCH
United States Senator



BECCA BALINT
Member of Congress