

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0609

July 25, 2025

The Honorable John Thune  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Minority leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins  
Chair  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Vice Chair  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Colleagues,

I write to respectfully request that swift action be taken to avoid the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Disaster Relief Fund's (DRF) imminent budget shortfall.

According to the National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI), 2024 was a record year for natural disasters in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Last year, there were 27 weather-related disasters with an estimated damage cost of more than \$1 billion, adding up to a total of \$184 billion in damage throughout the country. In the Southeast, Hurricane Helene alone claimed the lives of at least 250 Americans and left behind an estimated \$78.7 billion in damage, making it the deadliest U.S. hurricane since Katrina and the 7<sup>th</sup> costliest storm in our country's history.<sup>2</sup> Across the country, 1,796 tornadoes were confirmed in 2024, the second-most on record and only 21 behind the historic 2004 severe weather season.<sup>3</sup> At its peak in October 2024, more than 45% of the country was in moderate to exceptional drought.<sup>4</sup> In total, FEMA approved 90 Major Disaster declarations in 2024, nearly double the 30-year average of 55 declarations per year.<sup>5</sup>

In response, Congress passed the American Relief Act of 2025, with overwhelming bipartisan support in both the Senate and House of Representatives, to provide a supplemental appropriation of \$29 billion for the FEMA Disaster Relief Fund (DRF).<sup>6</sup> Your leadership was critical to secure this much-needed funding and avoid exhausting the DRF's Major Disasters account in January 2025. For that, I am deeply grateful.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/billions/#:~:text=In%202023%2C%20there%20were%2028,and%201%20winter%20storm%20event.>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/data/tcr/AL092024\\_Helene.pdf](https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/data/tcr/AL092024_Helene.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.weather.gov/news/250703\\_tornado\\_activity](https://www.weather.gov/news/250703_tornado_activity)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.drought.gov/historical-information?dataset=0&selectedDateUSDM=20241029>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.iied.org/sites/default/files/uploads/2025/03/IIED\\_FEMA\\_Disasters\\_Factsheet\\_Mar2025.pdf](https://www.iied.org/sites/default/files/uploads/2025/03/IIED_FEMA_Disasters_Factsheet_Mar2025.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [P.L. 118-158](#)

While my constituents continue rebuilding their lives and recovering from recent natural disasters, FEMA has already declared 24 Major Disasters in 2025.<sup>7</sup> The State of California alone has requested nearly \$35 billion in federal disaster funding for the Los Angeles wildfires in January.<sup>8</sup> In Appalachia and the Midwest, tornadoes, strong winds, and heavy rain have caused major destruction across Kentucky, Missouri, Tennessee, West Virginia, and parts of Southwestern Virginia. Earlier this month, severe flash flooding tragically claimed the lives of at least 135 people in Texas with local, state, and federal first responders still searching for at least three people who remain missing.<sup>9</sup> Preliminary estimates project \$18-\$22 billion in total damage and economic loss caused by the Texas flash floods.<sup>10</sup>

In March, Congress passed the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Full-Year Continuing Resolution, which again provided additional funding to the DRF.<sup>11</sup> While OMB and DHS publicly maintain that the DRF is solvent through the end of the fiscal year, recent data indicate otherwise.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, state emergency management leaders report sudden delays in reimbursements starting in June in what appears to be an attempt to avoid initiating Immediate Needs Funding (INF) before the end of the fiscal year to avoid exhausting the DRF's Major Disasters account. This de facto INF posture jeopardizes my state's recovery, and more concerning, places FEMA in a precarious financial posture as Congress leaves town for the August state work period.

As we head into the heart of hurricane and wildfire season, we simply cannot afford to wait until after disaster strikes to provide FEMA the emergency funding necessary to adequately respond. Therefore, I respectfully request that Congress act to replenish the FEMA DRF in the current work period.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration of this request. I stand ready to assist you in taking immediate action to ensure first responders and the American people have the resources they need to respond to and recover from natural disasters.

Sincerely,



Thom Tillis  
United States Senator

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<sup>7</sup>[https://www.fema.gov/disaster/declarations?field\\_dv2\\_declaration\\_date\\_value%5Bmin%5D=2025&field\\_dv2\\_declaration\\_date\\_value%5Bmax%5D=2025&field\\_dv2\\_declaration\\_type\\_value=DR&field\\_dv2\\_incident\\_type\\_target\\_id\\_selective=All](https://www.fema.gov/disaster/declarations?field_dv2_declaration_date_value%5Bmin%5D=2025&field_dv2_declaration_date_value%5Bmax%5D=2025&field_dv2_declaration_type_value=DR&field_dv2_incident_type_target_id_selective=All)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/02/21/newsom-sends-congress-40-billion-request-for-la-fire-aid-00205600>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/texas-floods-missing-people-death-toll-climbs/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.accuweather.com/en/blogs-webinars/texas-flash-flood-tragedy-lives-lost-and-billions-in-damages/1792503>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/1968/all-actions>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.eenews.net/articles/trump-budget-chief-said-disaster-fund-is-flush-fema-expects-a-huge-deficit/>