

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR**

**JOSH STEIN
GOVERNOR**

Friday, April 25, 2025

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Melissa Forbes, Ph.D.
Assistant Administrator of the Recovery Directorate
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C St. SW
Washington, DC 20024

Through: Robert D. Samaan
Regional Administrator, FEMA Region 4
3005 Chamblee Tucker Rd.
Atlanta, GA 30341

Dear President Trump,

Earlier this month, FEMA denied North Carolina's request for a 180-day extension of the 100% cost share for Helene costs eligible under the Stafford Act. Pursuant to 44 CFR § 206.46, I am writing to appeal this decision, which is already hampering our ongoing recovery efforts.

Hurricane Helene caused incredible damage to western North Carolina. As you noted when you visited the region in January, we need a focus on debris removal to create a clean slate from which we can effectively rebuild. Your encouragement led to needed new energy to the debris removal effort. Before you took office, the US Army Corps of Engineers took nearly three months after the storm hit to begin debris removal in earnest. Because of the delayed start, our state has effectively benefited from only three months of active debris removal by the Corps, even though North Carolina had been granted six months of reimbursed debris removal. In the last four weeks, under the reduced cost share, the Corps has nearly tripled its monthly rate of overall debris removal and has removed approximately the same amount of waterway debris that it had in the prior six-month period. This momentum is encouraging and critically needed, but we should be further along than the nearly 10 million cubic yards of right-of-way and waterway debris removed to date. Without the extension of 100% reimbursement, the state faces an ever-growing cost burden, at the same time revenues are down because of the devastating damage to a region dependent on tourism. Our preliminary estimates reveal that removing the remaining debris could cost an additional \$1-2 billion. I appreciate all you did to improve and bolster the Corps' response, but the truth is that the scale of the problem is immense, and we need more time and help to address it.

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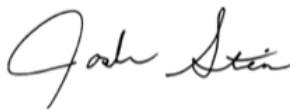
North Carolina is grateful for the federal disaster relief funds appropriated in the American Relief Act of 2025 (HR 10545). But we have seen very little of that money so far. Most federal agencies have not yet allocated North Carolina's share of the funding more than four months after HR 10545 passed. As a result, our state and local governments continue to shoulder outsized recovery costs while also grappling with a displaced workforce, damaged or destroyed infrastructure, wildfires exacerbated by excess unremoved debris, and local government budget shortfalls. I applaud FEMA for restarting its reimbursements for Public Assistance, but the two-month delay created an additional fiscal constraint. That funding was a key part of North Carolina's ability to focus its limited resources on necessary assistance, rebuilding the local economy, and supporting local governments that are overburdened after the storm. Slow reimbursement makes the state cash constrained and makes it difficult to move as quickly as our people deserve. The state has appropriated \$1.6 billion to address the ongoing recovery thus far, but much more is needed. Extending the 100% cost share for Helene-related costs would enable the state to continue to fund recovery efforts not permitted by federal law. Our state must continue to invest in the recovery, but we need federal support as well to get the job done right.

Although Helene was an unprecedented storm, extending the cost share is not unprecedented. FEMA granted similar extensions in response to Hurricanes Katrina, Maria, and Ike. Moreover, failing to grant an extension would worsen the already severe economic hardships western North Carolinians are experiencing. Last year, the state had four state-declared disasters in counties that were also affected by Helene. Additionally, North Carolina was granted a major Stafford Act disaster declaration for Potential Tropical Cyclone Eight in October and an emergency declaration for Tropical Storm Debby in August. The costs for responding to and recovering from those events are adding to our fiscal load.

I therefore respectfully urge you to reconsider FEMA's regretful decision and extend our 100% cost share period for six months – failing that, then for three months. Doing so would allow us to continue to build on the momentum you have helped us achieve. It would also send a strong message to our people that their federal government has not forgotten them.

I have seen how much you care about the people of this region and know that you are committed to helping them rebuild their lives. Please give them the tools they need to help their home region come back even better than before. I look forward to working with you and your staff on behalf of the strong people in western North Carolina.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Josh Stein". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Josh" and last name "Stein" clearly distinguishable.

Josh Stein
Governor

CC: Cameron Hamilton, Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Administrator