



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

**JOSH STEIN
GOVERNOR**

March 25, 2026

The Honorable Markwayne Mullin
Secretary of Homeland Security
United States Department of Homeland Security
301 7th Street SW
Washington, DC 20407

Dear Secretary Mullin,

Congratulations on your confirmation as Secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. I look forward to working with you to strengthen the federal-state partnership that survivors depend on in the aftermath of major disasters. Given your firsthand experience with disaster response and recovery in Oklahoma, I know you understand the long road communities face after the initial headlines fade. I write today regarding North Carolina's ongoing recovery from Hurricane Helene and the critical federal partnership needed to support impacted communities across western North Carolina. I also write to extend an open invitation for you to visit western North Carolina to see the status of our recovery firsthand.

As you know, western North Carolina continues its recovery from the hurricane that struck our state on September 27, 2024. The storm claimed 108 lives and caused nearly \$60 billion in damage. While the people of western North Carolina have made meaningful progress in the months since, much more work remains. On behalf of North Carolinians, I urge you to prioritize Hurricane Helene recovery—particularly by accelerating the disbursement of critical federal reimbursements through FEMA's Public Assistance (PA) and Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP).

FEMA Public Assistance

FEMA Public Assistance is essential to the region's recovery, reimbursing the state, local governments, and nonprofits for emergency services such as debris removal and for permanent work to rebuild infrastructure, including water and sewer systems, roads and bridges, schools, and other public facilities.

We are grateful for the nearly \$1.6 billion in Public Assistance funding obligated to North Carolina to date. However, substantial challenges remain. Roughly 2,000 projects, almost half of the total submitted, remain in various stages of FEMA approval nearly 18 months after Hurricane Helene hit North Carolina. In some cases, counties are awaiting reimbursement amounts that equal their entire annual operating budgets. This reimbursement-based system places significant strain on local governments, nonprofits, and state agencies, which must front the costs of emergency response and recovery while continuing to fund essential services. These delays also create uncertainty across other federal funding streams, making it difficult to determine how to allocate limited resources from other programs when FEMA eligibility remains unclear.

As you know, delays have been further exacerbated by the Department of Homeland Security shutdown, which has halted review of reimbursement approvals for permanent work and slowed the processing of payments for other projects. I was pleased to hear your commitment to repeal the Department of Homeland Security policy requiring the Secretary's signature on all expenditures of \$100,000 or more. In addition to repeal of this policy, I encourage you to allocate all available resources to expedite review of public assistance applications and to consider other reforms that will streamline reimbursements and hasten recovery efforts on the ground.

Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)

HMGP allows communities to rebuild in a way that reduces or mitigates the impacts of future disasters. Among other things, HMGP offers voluntary acquisition or elevation of properties deemed to be at significant risk for future flood damage. We appreciate FEMA's recent approval of a portion of pending HMGP applications for North Carolina, but the state has submitted hundreds more properties on behalf of property owners which are still awaiting approval from FEMA. These delays leave families and communities in prolonged uncertainty. Many property owners are continuing to pay mortgages, taxes, and insurance on homes that are uninhabitable or no longer exist. After enduring such loss, they deserve timely decisions that allow them to move forward. As with Public Assistance, HMGP reviews have been halted by the federal government shutdown of the Department of Homeland Security. I request that you do everything in your power to advance these outstanding applications so that the state and local communities can begin recovery work for these families and prepare for future disasters.

Local governments, businesses, and families across western North Carolina urgently need these resources to sustain recovery efforts and maintain essential services. I appreciate your attention to these issues and your support for disaster-impacted communities. I look forward to working with you to ensure that North Carolina receives the support it needs to fully recover from Hurricane Helene and hope to welcome you to North Carolina soon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Josh Stein". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Josh Stein
Governor

cc: FEMA Acting Administrator Karen Evans
North Carolina Congressional Delegation