

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 27, 2024

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

Dear Mr. President:

We write in full support of Maine Governor Janet Mills' request for a Major Disaster Declaration for eight of Maine's sixteen counties: Cumberland, Hancock, Knox, Lincoln, Sagadahoc, Waldo, Washington, and York.

As demonstrated in the Governor's request, it is clear these counties experienced substantial damages that collectively exceed the State's capabilities. The back-to-back coastal storms that entered Maine on January 10 and January 13, 2024, brought wind gusts of more than 60 to 80 miles per hour and heavy rainfall. The storms caused widespread historic coastal flooding, and historic damages to public and private infrastructure across the State's coastline and islands. Because these were the second and third severe storms in less than a month, we anticipate a lengthy recovery effort.

Due to the geographical proximity and interconnected impact of the storms, the Maine State government, supported by an analysis from the National Weather Service, assessed the damages as one event. We wrote to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) last month requesting that it also consider treating the back-to-back storms as a single event.

As you know, Maine currently has nine open Disaster Declarations for 2023, with a tenth requested in December and declared on January 31, 2024. Towns throughout the State are struggling with astronomical mitigation and infrastructure repair costs, with the added devastation from these two storms.

According to media reports, the January 10 storm's impact was similar to a hurricane, altering many sections of the coast by lowering beaches, damaging sea walls, and eroding dunes by up to 15 feet in certain areas. Coastal flooding was worsened in some places by rain and melting snow, in addition to the high tides, and winds were so strong that they pushed a 737-commercial aircraft into a jet bridge at the Portland International Jetport. Similarly, as shown in media reports covering the storm on January 13, the devastating impact exacerbated the existing

damages from a few days prior—destroying seawalls, leaving homes ready to collapse into the ocean, submerging vehicles, grounding fishing vessels, washing away fishing shacks, creating municipal water supply issues, floating oil tanks from unidentified sources, and causing hundreds of road closures.

Coastal communities statewide reported unprecedented damage to critical infrastructure, including roads, piers, wharfs, bridges, causeways, and docks. The destruction is catastrophic for commercial fishermen who depend upon this infrastructure for their livelihoods, and in some cases, island residents were cut off from the mainland because causeways were submerged. Local news coverage on both storms also included reports and photographs of homes washed away and floating in the flood waters, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) preliminary data suggests that the storm created record high water levels at a Bar Harbor monitoring site. It is our understanding that the Cumberland County City of Portland and the Washington County Town of Cutler also experienced near record high water levels. In Penobscot County, power outages and flooding closed a number of downtown Bangor businesses. The magnitude of the damages is immeasurable and will be felt for many years to come.


Due to extensive damage across the stated region, the Governor requested Public Assistance (PA) categories A through G, and Z, as well as Individual Assistance, and Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funding for use statewide. The State has verified that all of the damaged infrastructure included in the validation process is not eligible for commercially available insurance coverage, placing all repair costs on local government taxpayers if federal assistance is not obtained. Due to the extent of infrastructure damages, State resources are not adequate to meet local recovery needs.

We urge you to expeditiously approve Governor Mills' request for Major Disaster Declarations for the counties in question. Handling this expeditiously is especially warranted as many of these areas have been affected by other disasters, some natural, some economic, all of which have made this a particularly difficult year for the region. The people of Maine are in great need of this federal assistance, and we thank you for your support.

Sincerely,


Susan M. Collins
United States Senator


Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress


Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator


Jared F. Golden
Member of Congress