

Office of the Governor
State of Louisiana

JOHN BEL EDWARDS
GOVERNOR



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September 17, 2021

U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy
520 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510

U.S. Senator John Kennedy
416 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510

U.S. Representative Steve Scalise
2049 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

U.S. Representative Mike Johnson
568 Cannon House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

U.S. Representative Garret Graves
2402 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

U.S. Representative Julia Letlow
1408 Longworth House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

U.S. Representative Clay Higgins
572 Cannon House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

U.S. Representative Troy Carter, Sr.
506 Cannon House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Members of the Louisiana Congressional Delegation:

I write today to make clear the needs of the State of Louisiana in order to ensure a speedy, full recovery from Hurricanes Laura, Delta and Zeta last year and Hurricane Ida last month, and to ask your assistance to accomplish this important work. As you know, it has been over a year since Hurricane Laura made landfall in Southwest Louisiana, followed shortly by Delta, and shortly thereafter the effects of Hurricane Zeta were visited upon Southeast Louisiana. At the beginning of this year, portions of our state suffered from a damaging freeze with spring flooding following shortly thereafter and, most recently, Hurricane Ida devastated the southern parishes. Amidst these natural disasters, Louisiana fought a pandemic which has sickened and killed thousands of our citizens and stymied economic growth. As you know, there is an urgent need to provide immediate relief to our Louisiana families, businesses and individuals who have been impacted, and the help of the federal government is absolutely critical. Louisiana needs an appropriation of funding for disaster recovery, including Community Development Block Grants, Social Services Block Grants and investments in resilience-building infrastructure.

Over the past year, four major hurricanes have made landfall in Louisiana. Hurricane Laura struck on August 27 as a category 4 storm, followed quickly by Hurricane Delta, a category 2 storm which landed in approximately the same geographic area on October 9, and then Hurricane Zeta, likely a Category 3 storm, made landfall in Southeast Louisiana on October 28. These

hurricanes devastated much of coastal Southwest Louisiana, with significant impacts across the entire state. These storms caused destruction to homes, businesses, and public infrastructure throughout the State, with all sixty-four parishes now included in the Major Disaster Declaration. These storms were responsible for 34 storm related fatalities and resulted in over 20,000 survivors being sheltered across multiple states.

Hurricane Ida made landfall on August 29, 2021, 16 years following Hurricane Katrina, as a strong Category 4 storm with sustained wind of 150 mph near landfall. Hurricane Ida caused widespread power outages across the impacted area with over 1m outages as well as water outages affecting over 700k citizens. Twenty-nine fatalities have been associated with the storm and almost 1,000 people remain in shelters at this time and thousands of others living in very difficult circumstances. Recovery efforts are focused on restoration of power, water, and debris removal. As an example, there are challenges with the extent of the debris needing to be removed, including trash pickup in New Orleans and other parishes, necessitating that the State coordinate with local governments and FEMA to accommodate the increased costs that are being incurred because of the post-hurricane clean-up. However, the most difficult and long-term task remains timely solutions for an estimated 8,000 households with homes that are either destroyed or with major damage.

Using FEMA's data for Individual Assistance for Laura/Delta/Zeta, and taking insurance and other available funding sources into account, we estimate the unmet housing needs of renters and homeowners to be over \$900 million. In addition, the burden on state and local governments to pay the match on FEMA's Public Assistance grants from these storms will be more than \$130 million. There is also an estimated loss to businesses of \$2 billion, along with crop and timber losses of over \$2 billion.

Because it was such a recent event, we do not yet have applicant-specific data on Hurricane Ida. Nonetheless, we do know that FEMA currently estimates they will have 803,000 registrants for Individual Assistance, nearly three times the number of registrations received for Laura/Delta/Zeta combined. While no two disasters are the same, it is a fairly safe assumption that unmet housing needs for Ida will be well over \$2.5 billion based on historical damages from similar events. The current estimate for Public Assistance for this disaster is \$2.2 billion, which will require state and local governments to pay \$226 million just to cover the non-federal share of these grants, a cost that has in the past been covered with CDBG-DR. While very preliminary, estimates of crop and timber losses from Hurricane Ida are more than \$200 million. We do not yet have any estimates of business losses but, they will be substantial, likely, in the billions of dollars. Louisiana's fishing industry, both commercial and recreational, is the second largest in the United States. As stated above, it has been a very short time since Hurricane Ida made landfall, but, using known damages from previous disasters as a guide, estimated losses within the Fishing Industry will be as much as \$480 million.

While rebuilding homes and infrastructure and businesses are all critical to our recovery, we must also recognize the toll these disasters take on our people. Children and families living within parishes in a declared disaster zone for these recent storms are far more likely to be living

in poverty than the U.S. average. Against a backdrop already exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, these disasters are expected to strain mental and physical health with Black communities potentially more vulnerable to both short and long-term health challenges. Housing, child care and educational facilities have been damaged or destroyed across a wide swath of coastal Louisiana. More than 90% of businesses, payroll and major tax revenues including income, sales and property taxes are tied to impacted parishes adding additional financial stress for many Louisiana families.

As we drive the recovery from these storms forward, we must also look to future storms and how to make our state stronger and more resilient when they come. Hurricane Ida tested Louisiana's major hurricane protection and risk reduction systems in a way they have not been tested before. Ida made landfall as a major Hurricane with strong Category 4 winds producing a storm surge of 16 feet at its highest point. As devastating as Ida's impacts were from the wind, Louisiana's investments in coastal infrastructure since Hurricane Katrina unquestionably saved countless lives and protected billions of dollars of property from damage by reducing the impact of storm surges on our coastal communities.

No storm risk reduction alternative can be formulated that will provide total protection against all potential storms. Louisiana's best strategy is to rely on a multiple-lines-of-defense strategy that includes nature-based features such as barrier islands, marshes, and ridges to complement structures such as levees and floodgates as well as nonstructural measures such as raised homes and evacuation. Attached to this letter is a priority list detailing additional investments Louisiana requests in any disaster supplemental to protect our citizens and restore our coast. This attachment details additional funds requested for both hurricane risk reduction and coastal restoration projects. To complement the list of priority projects, a list of policy priorities is also included in the attached.

The storms of the past thirteen months have also caused massive damage to the state's electrical transmission systems. Hurricanes Laura/Delta/Zeta resulted in approximately \$545 million in electrical company investments, and current estimates for necessary infrastructure investments as a result of Ida are approximately \$750 million. Southwest Louisiana is a major industrial hub for the American energy sector and contains the West Hackberry Strategic Petroleum Reserve, which holds nearly 200 million barrels of oil for our national security. Southeast Louisiana and the New Orleans region and surrounding parishes also contain numerous nationally significant infrastructure assets, including the Louisiana Offshore Oil Port (LOOP) and the Port of New Orleans. Neither the State nor local rate payers and taxpayers, many of whom are low-income individuals, should bear the whole burden of funding enhancements and restoration that are of clear national importance. I ask Congress to provide specific funding to support mitigation projects that will help Southwest and Southeast Louisiana and the New Orleans region and surrounding parishes become more resilient to storm events.

In addition to the needs above, healthcare organizations in Louisiana suffered significant losses from the 2020 storms and Hurricane Ida on top of the funding challenges from the fourth surge of COVID-19 still underway in Louisiana. During Hurricane Ida, hospitals all across

southeast Louisiana sustained significant damage, and several had to close outright due to damage and power issues. Further, the already razor-thin market for healthcare professionals prior to Hurricane Ida dramatically worsened when many of those providers had to evacuate or shelter elsewhere because their home was damaged. This has increased health care labor costs significantly. Thus, I am also asking for consideration of an additional and specific appropriation through the Department of Health and Human Services for health care organizations to ensure that, as Louisiana rebuilds from the storms of the last 13 months, the people of Louisiana will be able to have available and thriving health care organizations in their communities.

The funding needs described above are critical to our state's recovery, and we need your help to bring them home. The speed of our recovery is also critical to success, and to our people who are in need now. There are several legislative actions that can help contribute to the pace of recovery by removing statutory and regulatory hurdles, saving time and money, both of which are in short supply.

- **Expand Direct Repair Authority under Individual Assistance:** The proposed change to the Stafford Act would allow for permanent housing repair to be evaluated alongside other housing options and implemented regardless of the availability or limitations of other solutions.
- **Reset FEMA authority to grant funding to states to implement housing programs:** The proposed change to the Stafford Act would allow FEMA the authority to grant funding of temporary housing programs to states for implementation by the state.
- **Flexible Match for Public Assistance:** The proposed change to the Stafford Act would allow for a streamlined and less-burdensome approach to accounting for non-Federal cost share under FEMA Public Assistance program.
- **Extension of Disaster Recovery Reform Act Duplication of Benefit Flexibility:** The proposed change to the Stafford Act would allow recent declarations to utilize the flexibility on duplication of benefits authorized under the DRRA.
- **Extension of Disaster Recovery Reform Act Relief from Excessive Reductions Based upon Flood Insurance for Campuses:** The proposed change to the Stafford Act would prevent excessive and burdensome reductions to Public Assistance for certain critical facilities that experience flooding as a result of major disasters declared after December 31, 2018.
- **Allow HUD to waive the current federal site-specific Environment Review Requirement ("ERR", a HUD NEPA compliance requirement) for single family home rehabilitation,** where such site-specific ERR could cost as much as \$1,000 per inspection, an unnecessary expense when, for many homes in rehabilitation (not reconstruction), the home's footprint will not change.

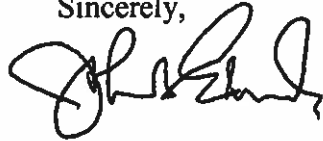
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These funding requests and the above recommended legislative changes are critical to the recovery of our state and its people. I know you will act with urgency to address these needs. Thank you again for your efforts in making our state's recovery fast, robust and lasting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Bel Edwards". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" being the most prominent.

John Bel Edwards
Governor

cc: Cedric Richmond

Senior Advisor to the President and Director of the Office of Public Engagement