

Office of the Governor
State of Louisiana

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January 22, 2021

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

Dear Mr. President:

It was a tremendous privilege and very memorable experience for me and my son to attend your inauguration this week. Your message of unity and hope were inspiring and your administration represents an opportunity for a fresh start, new energy and bold leadership to meet the challenges before us. In fact, I want to thank you for your quick action waiving the local match for the FEMA COVID-19 costs and implementing the 100 percent cost-share. This will greatly benefit Louisiana by relieving the heavy financial burden from our local governments.

As we briefly discussed during our conversation after your election, Louisiana was struck by three devastating hurricanes over the course of just two months:

Hurricane Laura, August 27, 2020 – Category 4

Hurricane Delta, October 9, 2020 – Category 2 (same geographic area as Hurricane Laura)

Hurricane Zeta, October 28, 2020 – Category 3

We are very grateful for the responsiveness of our federal partners as Louisiana rebuilds from these catastrophic hurricanes; however, the effective recovery from these storms requires additional federal support consistent with previous storms of similar magnitude and impact.

Please see the attached PowerPoint detailing the destruction caused by Hurricanes Laura and Delta.

These three hurricanes have been devastating for much of coastal Louisiana, more specifically: Cameron Parish and Calcasieu Parish, which is home to the community of Lake Charles. In addition, they had significant impacts across the entire state causing destruction to homes, businesses, and public infrastructure. As a result, all sixty-four parishes are now included in the Major Disaster Declaration. Many of these communities were in the midst of recovering from the first storm only to be hit again by a subsequent storm - all under the shadow of the COVID 19 Pandemic.

As in previous times of difficulty, Louisianans have once again risen to meet the challenges of rebuilding by helping their friends, families, neighbors and even total strangers begin the process of starting anew. While we do not doubt the ability of our citizens to recover, we need the help of the federal government to make that recovery complete. Thus, after careful consideration of Louisiana's needs, I respectfully request your support for a disaster appropriations package to address the significant recovery needs faced by thousands of Louisiana families and communities across the state.

The disaster appropriations package would focus primarily on **Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funds**. The FEMA Individual Assistance funds that will be available for all three storms, while critical, will simply not be sufficient to allow our citizens to rebuild their homes and communities; and the Public Assistance funds to rebuild infrastructure will not be adequate to make our communities more resilient in the future. Without an appropriation of CDBG-DR funds, many neighborhoods and communities will not be able to recover. I ask that you request a supplemental appropriation from Congress to fill the enormous gap that will exist between the available funds and the costs to rebuild. Based on information available to date, the initial estimate is \$3 billion for the unmet needs of the citizens of Louisiana with respect to homeowner and rental housing, infrastructure and economic development.

In Louisiana, we clearly understand the federal focus on investing in mitigating damage from future disasters to shrink the need for future disaster recovery packages. In the appropriations for 2016-17 disasters, Congress included CDBG-Mitigation (CDBG-MIT) funds for just that purpose. In Louisiana, we are using those funds to institute fundamental changes in our statewide approach to flood risk reduction, an initiative that we believe will dramatically reduce damages from flooding in our state for decades to come. We are firm believers in the value of mitigation, and request that additional CDBG-MIT funding be included in the recovery package, as well.

In addition, other important areas of need and opportunity are provided here for consideration:

1. **Social Services Block Grant funding.** The widespread cumulative impact of COVID-19 along with multiple hurricanes in one year is unprecedented. The toll that these multiple stressors have taken on our people, our infrastructure, and our economy is immense. It has created a level of behavioral health needs that the state cannot meet with current resources. To assist in our recovery, I am seeking supplemental SSBG funding to meet the striking rise in behavioral health care, child welfare, community social services, child care, and household-related needs of residents in hurricane impacted communities across the state. This funding would increase access to evidence-based behavioral health services, provide enhanced crisis care coordination, promote access to health insurance coverage and care for impacted residents who qualify for Louisiana Medicaid, and stabilize the child welfare network and social services supports that aid in the complete recovery of citizens.
2. **Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) Program funding.** The catastrophic impact of these events on the housing sector, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, have resulted

in a range of significant housing and sheltering needs. ESG funding provides critical assistance to the most vulnerable populations that cannot be effectively served with other programs or funding opportunities. Without this funding, many of these families will face the reality of homelessness and further burden the social service network that is already challenged by the impacts of these events.

3. **FEMA Cost Share Reduction.** Consistent with your action on COVID-19 funding, granting a reduction for the 25% cost share for communities across the state for these disasters would provide an immediate relief to these communities. The previous administration provided a 30 day waiver of the cost share under sections 403 and 407 of the Stafford Act for debris removal and emergency protective measures for Hurricane Laura (DR-4559), which has been very helpful. To maximize the benefit of this waiver, I am requesting the flexibility to allow each eligible entity to establish their own waiver period. Further, I am asking that the period of this waiver be extended to 45 days consistent with the approval provided for the State of Florida for Hurricane Michael (DR-4399)¹. This flexibility will ensure every eligible entity is helped by this waiver, as there is a significant difference in the timing of costs across the impacted area exacerbated by the interruption of Hurricane Laura recovery efforts triggered by the response to Hurricane Delta. This flexibility can be implemented while also minimizing the administrative burden of state and federal partners.
4. **United States Army Corps of Engineers funding.** The Southwest Coastal Louisiana Study is the first Federally-authorized feasibility-level study with the dual purpose of hurricane and storm damage risk reduction, through the National Economic Development plan, and coastal restoration through the National Ecosystem Restoration plan for the southwest Louisiana parishes of Cameron, Calcasieu and Vermilion. We request federal investment for the Southwest Coastal project, which has been thoroughly studied by the US Army Corps of Engineers and the State of Louisiana and is ready for implementation. Additionally, the federal protection project on Grand Isle was severely impacted during multiple tropical events resulting in failure of the dune as a result of Hurricane Zeta. We ask that federal funding be made available to the US Army Corps of Engineers to address the chronic erosion on the west end of the Grand Isle & Vicinity Project.
5. **Natural Resource Conservation Service funding.** Funding for the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program and the Emergency Watershed Protection – Floodplain Easement Program (EWP-FPE) is needed to assist with critical projects to reduce future losses and address critical impacts from these storms not covered by other agencies or authorities. The cumulative impact of multiple storms has resulted in trees and other debris clogging stream channels increasing the flood risk in the future rainfall events. This funding has been very helpful for Louisiana communities in the recovery from

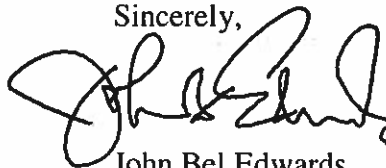
¹ <https://www.fema.gov/disaster-federal-register-notice/amendment-no-8-77>

previous disasters and I am requesting support for funding to address issues caused by Laura, Delta, and Zeta.

The people of Louisiana remain strong and resilient in the face of the compounding impact of these storms. The recovery from these storms requires additional funding and support to address the significant unmet needs that persist despite the great efforts of our citizens and communities. Recovery is always slow and difficult, but these unique circumstances require additional federal support. I ask for your favorable consideration of these requests and that you encourage your administration to continue its strong support for Louisiana's recovery.

Finally, although we have major challenges to address, we are extremely optimistic about the future under your outstanding leadership and experience. We look forward to working with you and your administration on these and other challenges that face our State and Country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Bel Edwards". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "B".

John Bel Edwards
Governor

cc: U.S. Senator William G. "Bill" Cassidy
U.S. Senator John Kennedy
U.S. Congressman Stephen J. Scalise
U.S. Congressman G. Clay Higgins
U.S. Congressman J. Michael "Mike" Johnson
U.S. Congressman Garret N. Graves