



Janet T. Mills
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MAINE
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
1 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE
04333-0001

**REQUEST FOR PRESIDENTIAL DISASTER DECLARATION
GOVERNOR'S REQUEST COVER LETTER
MAJOR DISASTER OR EMERGENCY**

January 16, 2024

The Honorable Joe Biden
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Through: Ms. Lori Ehrlich
Regional Administrator
FEMA Region 1
220 Binney Street
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02142

Dear Mr. President:

Under the provisions of Section 401 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 5121-5207 (Stafford Act), and implemented by 44 CFR § 206.36, I humbly request that you declare a Major Disaster for the counties of Androscoggin, Franklin, Hancock, Kennebec, Oxford, Penobscot, Piscataquis, Somerset, Waldo and Washington in the state of Maine as a result of a severe storm and flood event that occurred between December 17, 2023, and December 21, 2023. Specifically, I am requesting Public Assistance (PA) categories A through G and Z for the counties of Androscoggin, Franklin, Hancock, Oxford, Penobscot, Piscataquis, Somerset, Waldo and Washington. I am requesting Individual Assistance and all supporting areas for the counties of Androscoggin, Franklin, Kennebec, Oxford, and Somerset. I am also requesting Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funding for use statewide.

Details of my request are offered in the attached Request for Presidential Disaster Declaration (OMB Control No. 1660-0009/FEMA Form 010-0-13) and the extent of damages are further supported with supplemental information. Validated damages for the event can be found in Enclosure A: Supplemental Information for Individual Assistance and Enclosure B: Supplemental Information for Public Assistance. Meteorological factors and precursors for this severe storm and flood event have also been supplied and are described in detail in the attached National Weather Service Event Report.

Rainfall began the evening of December 17, 2023, across Western Maine and quickly moved north and east throughout the night. On December 18th, a strong low-pressure system moved across the state of Maine bringing a combination of intensely damaging storm conditions that tragically claimed the lives of



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four individuals. Heavy rainfall, rapid snowmelt, partially frozen ground, and pre-saturated soils all resulted in catastrophic flooding across three of Maine's large river systems, the Kennebec River, the Androscoggin River, and the Saco River. Over a dozen river gages reached major and/or record flood levels following heavy rain and snowmelt, resulting in the need for two municipalities to perform emergency evacuations. Minor coastal flooding and coastal erosion occurred due to the combination of storm surge and large battering nearshore waves. Furthermore, widespread prolonged and damaging winds ranging between 45-80mph resulted in extensive downed trees and power lines.

The Maine Emergency Management Agency moved from Enhanced Monitoring on December 17th to activation of the State Emergency Operations Center between December 18th and December 24th. Emergency Response Team members were activated to support coordination across all seven critical lifelines, and aerial damage assessments were conducted within the incident period to expedite understanding of scope and magnitude. To mobilize all state of Maine resources to assist and support response and recovery efforts across the state, a Proclamation of a State of Civil Emergency was declared for Androscoggin, Aroostook, Franklin, Hancock, Kennebec, Knox, Lincoln, Oxford, Penobscot, Piscataquis, Sagadahoc, Somerset, Waldo and Washington Counties on December 19th.

Power outages effected approximately 443,475 properties as a result of the severe storm and flood event, leaving nearly a third of Maine's population and infrastructure without power. Due to high floodwaters and damaged roads, large portions of the state remained inaccessible to utility crews resulting in a further prolonging of power outages for thousands. Severely damaged power lines further added to the complexity of power restoration efforts during one of Maine's coldest months of the year. Utility companies reported staying in storm response and recovery mode for a total of seven days after the event, although many secondary and seasonal homes remain without power at this time.

Two municipal evacuations occurred due to high flood waters, one in Oxford County and one in Androscoggin County. In addition to the municipal evacuation in Oxford County, approximately 80 residents and staff residing in a nursing home in Oxford County were also temporarily evacuated due to high flood waters. In total, twenty-four warming centers and six emergency shelters opened across the counties of Kennebec, Franklin, Androscoggin, Somerset, Oxford, and Waldo. At peak, there were an estimated 100 displaced individuals residing in emergency shelters. The number of individuals that remain displaced from this event is not clear. The state obtained record of sixteen water rescues for individuals trapped in flooded vehicles and structures, however the actual number of water rescues is expected to have been significantly higher. The vast majority of water rescues were documented in Oxford County, however instances of water rescues were also documented in Cumberland County.

Dozens of schools, municipal offices, state offices, and many businesses remained closed December 18th and December 19th due to damages or hazardous road conditions. Closures continued for days to come in some of the higher impact areas, with an undefined number of businesses closed indefinitely in the central and western portion of the state. Public and private entities dedicated thousands of hours acting on dam Emergency Action Plans, restoring damaged communication towers, responding to wastewater treatment flooding, and reopening roads. Substantially high flood waters and severe weather conditions also resulted in widespread debris across vegetative, construction and demolition, white goods, soil, mud, sand, vehicle, and hazardous waste classifications leading municipalities to activate debris management plans. To date, the Maine Department of Environmental Protection has conducted storm



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spill pump outs to remove oil and other hazardous materials and conduct vapor assessments for over 90 structures.

The American Red Cross and partners have provided 154 overnight stays for more than 101 residences in four emergency shelters. A total of 612 meals and snacks, 513 relief items, and 400 clean ups kits and other supplies have been provided to people in need. To date the American Red Cross has opened 86 cases, serving 242 people with recovery support, including financial assistance, replacement of eyeglasses and other medical needs like prescriptions, as well as cleaning supplies. Thirty-one cases have been completed and the volunteer group will continue to work with clients across 55 open cases, to include the families that lost loved ones during this event. Maine Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (VOAD) deployed Southern Baptist Disaster Services and Team Rubicon to support recovery and cleanup efforts in high impact areas within Oxford County. A total of 138 requests for assistance have been received to date within Maine VOAD's Crisis Cleanup Website Platform. 53 cases have been identified by Maine VOAD organizations that will assist, 71 remain unclaimed at this time, and 14 cases are reported as closed. Boothbay V.E.T.S. (Veterans Emergency Temporary Shelter) Inc., also deployed one trailer for one veteran displaced from his home as a result of severe flood damage, who subsequently also lost his woodworking business due to a flooded garage.

On January 4, 2024, Food and Nutrition Services approved the Maine Department of Health and Human Services' request to issue mass food replacements to impacted households. This waiver approval allows households to receive replacement of benefits as stated in the approval as a result of power outages due to the severe storms that began on December 18th. On December 21st, Food and Nutrition Services also approved the Maine Department of Health and Human Services' request to waive the ten day reporting requirement for food purchased with SNAP benefits that was lost as a result of power outages associated with the severe storm and flood event. Furthermore, the Maine Grocers and Food Producers Association (MGFPA) and Retail Association of Maine (RAM) came together to create the Maine Business Relief Fund, a grant funding opportunity to help provide some necessary support to businesses with cleanup efforts and the replacement of lost inventory. 211 Maine had also been activated early on in the event to aid in the collection of Individual and Household Damage Assessments and Business and Agriculture Damage Assessments, for which 955 submissions had been received depicting substantial flood and wind damage to primary structures and additional devastation to side structures such as barns and greenhouses.

FEMA Public Assistance teams and Individual Assistance teams were requested on December 22nd and December 28th respectively to assist with Joint Preliminary Damage Assessments. A total of four Public Assistance Joint Preliminary Damage Assessment Teams were deployed to Maine to assist state, county, local, and tribal partners in the assessment of \$20 million in estimated damages across a total of ten counties (Androscoggin, Franklin, Hancock, Kennebec, Oxford, Penobscot, Piscataquis, Somerset, Waldo, and Washington) and two Tribal Nations (Penobscot Indian Nation and Passamaquoddy Tribe at Indian Township). A total of three Individual Assistance Joint Preliminary Damage Assessment Teams were deployed to Maine to assist state, county, local, and tribal partners in the assessment of damages across a total of eight counties (Androscoggin, Cumberland, Franklin, Kennebec, Oxford, Penobscot, Piscataquis, and Somerset) and one Tribal Nation (Passamaquoddy Tribe at Pleasant Point).

The Joint Preliminary Damage Assessment for Individual Assistance was completed through site visits between January 2nd and January 6th. The counties of Androscoggin, Franklin, Kennebec, Oxford, and



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Somerset were confirmed as meeting FEMA requirements for Individual Assistance, as represented in Enclosure A. Joint Preliminary Damage Assessment results identified a total of 13 destroyed, 106 major, 65 minor, and 31 affected properties, with 102 of the structures observed residing in Oxford County alone. Its notable that the Joint Preliminary Damage Assessment process only visited a small subset of home damages across the five counties, and actual major damages are to be considered significantly higher than represented within Enclosure A. Owner occupancy across all five counties averaged at 74% with a flood insurance average of only 6%. The resulting cost estimate for the Individuals and Household Program from the Joint Preliminary Damage Assessment is \$2,306,952. The Total Taxable Resources for the State of Maine is \$82.4B. The Joint Preliminary Damage Assessment across the five counties has resulted in an Individuals and Households Program Cost-to-Capacity ratio of 28.

Percentage of the population:	<i>for whom poverty status is determined</i>	<i>pre-disaster unemployment rate</i>	<i>65 years and older</i>	<i>with a disability under 65</i>	<i>who speak a language other than English at home</i>
Data Source	U.S. Census Bureau (2020)	U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (Nov. 2023)	U.S. Census Bureau (2020)	U.S. Census Bureau (2020)	U.S. Census Bureau (2020)
National Average	11.5%	3.7%	17.3%	8.9%	21.7%
State Average	10.8%	3%	22.6%	15.8%	6%
Androscoggin County Average	14%	3.2%	19%	13.3%	10.6%
Franklin County Average	14.2%	4.1%	23.6%	13.9%	3.1%
Kennebec County Average	12.2%	2.9%	21.5%	12.8%	4.7%
Oxford County Average	14.4%	3.3%	22.8%	17.9%	2.1%
Somerset County Average	14.8%	4.4%	23%	15.2%	2.8%

With the hardest hit areas residing in low-income communities, and limitations associated with the lack of skilled contractors, available housing and readily available major household items, the ability for these individuals to recover is well beyond the physical or fiscal capacity of the community or the state at large to support. The majority of Maine dwellings maintain most of the home’s major appliances within the basement area, so, with flood levels often rising to the first level of the dwelling, this event resulted in the complete simultaneous destruction of furnaces, hot water heaters, electrical panels, heating oil tanks, and freezers filled with newly processed livestock for hundreds of hardworking individuals and families across Maine. Furthermore, numerous self-employed woodworkers, mechanics, and retailers now suffer unemployment due to tools, machinery, and inventory lost in flooded basements or garages. Mold remediation is a secondary issue, and while community members and volunteer agencies have certainly come together, the extent and severity of damage combined with the lack of readily available resources during the coldest months in Maine certainly delays a disaster survivor’s ability to recover. Children and families have experienced varying levels of trauma due to the



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rapid nature with which roads and structures flooded, and a number of individuals are sadly grieving the loss of loved ones. One individual also spoke of having to be resuscitated after being stuck in flood waters in the basement of he and his wife's business, resulting in traumas associated with loss of inventory, equipment, and the potential loss of life. The state of Maine is therefore requesting every available area within the Individual Assistance program to support the impacted individuals and families across Androscoggin, Franklin, Kennebec, Oxford, and Somerset counties.

The Joint Preliminary Damage Assessment for Public Assistance was completed through site visits between January 2nd and January 5th. The counties of Androscoggin, Franklin, Hancock, Oxford, Penobscot, Piscataquis, Somerset, Waldo, and Washington were confirmed as meeting FEMA requirements for Public Assistance, as represented in Enclosure B. Joint Preliminary Damage Assessment results validated a total of \$5,834,655 in public infrastructure damages. That total is expected to rise as MEMA and FEMA continue work with county and local partners to complete the validation of public infrastructure damages across Kennebec County.

Validated damages from the event are currently broken down as follows; Category A (Debris Removal) was \$815,459 (13.98%); Category B (Protective Measures) was \$2,019,696 (34.62%); Category C (Roads and Bridges) was \$1,293,820 (22.17%); Category D (Water Control) was \$0 (0%); Category E (Buildings and Equipment) was \$387,975 (6.65%); Category F (Public Utilities) was \$1,031,701 (17.68%); and Category G (Parks and Other) \$286,006 (4.90%). Category D was not a focus in the Joint Preliminary Damage Assessment, however damages were sustained and will be represented should this event be declared.

Within the last 24 months, Maine has received a total of five disaster declarations and one emergency declaration. On March 15, 2022, DR-4647 was declared across three counties for a severe storm and flooding. On March 22, 2023, DR-4696 was declared across a total of six counties for another severe storm and flood event. On July 26, 2023, DR-4719 was declared across a total of eight counties for yet another severe storm and flood event. On September 5, 2023, DR-4736 was declared for Franklin County for a severe storm and flood event, and one day later on September 6, 2023, DR-4737 was declared for a severe storm and flood event in Oxford County. An Emergency Declaration, EM-3598-ME, was declared on September 14, 2023, in advance of Hurricane Lee.

With the increased frequency and intensity of storm events in Maine over the last 24 months, emergency management officials across all levels of government have been stretched in their fiscal and programmatic capacity to respond to and recover from disasters, especially in the hard-hit western portions of the state. Supplemental grants through FEMA would enable all ten affected counties and the state of Maine to effectively build back after the highly devastating December 17th-21st severe storm and flood event.

It has been verified that all of the damaged infrastructure included in the validation process is not eligible for commercially available insurance coverage, and, therefore, all repair costs must be covered by 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. At this time, the state of Maine and ten counties have successfully met their respective per capita thresholds, so I once again, humbly, request that a Major Disaster be declared due to the December 17th-21st, 2023, severe storm and flood event.



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I have designated Peter Rogers, Director, MEMA, as the State Coordinating Officer for this request. He will work with FEMA and may provide further information or justification on my behalf.

Thank you for your continuing support of the state of Maine and our citizens.

Sincerely,



Janet T. Mills
Governor

Enclosures

OMB Control No. 1660-0009/FEMA Form 010-0-13

Enclosure A: Supplemental Information for Individual Assistance

Enclosure B: Supplemental Information for Public Assistance

Enclosure C: Requirements for Other Federal Agency Programs

Additional Supporting Documentation: NWS Weather Event Report_12.17.2023-12.21.2023



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