

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 8, 2025

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

More than three months ago, Hurricane Helene unleashed devastation throughout Western North Carolina the likes of which we have never seen. While the people of Western North Carolina have made progress in rebuilding their lives, the road to recovery remains long and tenuous for our state.

As we have said since Hurricane Helene made landfall, this is an unprecedented storm that requires an unprecedented response. To date, the State of North Carolina has allocated more than \$1.1 billion to the Hurricane Helene Fund.¹ Likewise, we worked with our colleagues in Congress to pass the American Relief Act of 2025 to provide billions of dollars in disaster relief funding to North Carolina which you signed into law on December 21, 2024.² This funding is critical to Western North Carolina's survival, but again, we must respond differently.

We wrote to you on November 22, 2024, with several of our North Carolina congressional colleagues, to request that you immediately deploy Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) direct temporary housing resources in Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHA) in Western North Carolina to allow displaced North Carolinians to return to their property and begin putting their lives back together.³ Sadly, we have not yet received your response, and the situation on the ground has only worsened.

While more than 5,600 North Carolina households are currently enrolled in FEMA Transitional Sheltering Assistance (TSA) hotels, FEMA has made little to no progress in deploying direct temporary housing resources.⁴ Now, 103 days after Hurricane Helene hit Western North Carolina, **only 93 families** have been placed in FEMA direct housing. For comparison, at this same point after Hurricane Florence devastated Eastern North Carolina in 2018, FEMA had placed **413 families** in direct temporary housing. This is unacceptable.

¹ <https://bergerpress.medium.com/senate-overrides-gov-coopers-veto-of-senate-bill-382-adb5982496e3>

² <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/legislation/2024/12/21/press-release-bill-signed-h-r-10545/>

³ <https://www.budd.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Budd-11.22.25-Letter-to-Biden-and-FEMA-on-WNC-Flood-Areas-FINAL-0025.pdf>

⁴ https://www.transylvaniatimes.com/news/fema-gives-update-on-action-taken-available-help/article_e4ce1030-cd02-11ef-b217-93847bf8bf16.html

The people of Western North Carolina cannot wait any longer for assistance. Therefore, we again demand you deploy all available federal disaster recovery resources, especially direct temporary housing assistance, and waive any undue regulatory burdens that may impede progress toward getting families out of hotels and back on their property in a warm and safe home for the winter. We appreciate your prompt consideration of this request and stand ready to work with you to correct course and deliver long-overdue assistance to Hurricane Helene survivors.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Thom Tillis in blue ink, positioned above a horizontal line.

Thom Tillis
U.S. Senator

Handwritten signature of Ted Budd in blue ink, positioned above a horizontal line.

Ted Budd
U.S. Senator

cc: Deanne Criswell, Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency