



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Office of the Governor

Glenn Youngkin
Governor

November 15, 2024

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

Dear President Biden:

In the wake of the devastating impact of Hurricane Helene, the most significant disaster in the Commonwealth in decades, we are requesting additional federal assistance in both financial support and expedited services to swiftly address the substantial damage impacting the lives and livelihoods of residents in Southwest Virginia. The recovery and rebuilding for more than 36 counties across southwestern Virginia, many in the Appalachian region, will require an important financial commitment. On behalf of the citizens of the Commonwealth of Virginia, we are respectfully requesting \$4.4 billion in federal support.

While our prepositioning of response resources from the Virginia National Guard, Virginia State Police and other law enforcement prevented additional deaths and injuries, the devastation to our farms, local businesses and critical infrastructure, tourism assets and homes has been widespread. The resilience of Southwest Virginia, in partnership and collaboration with federal, state, and local partners, was pivotal in the immediate response efforts. As we shifted from response to recovery efforts, our administration established the Office of Hurricane Helene Recovery and Rebuilding to provide strategic oversight and better align resources across agencies to ensure that affected areas receive focused support. While this office continues to work collaboratively with our partners at all levels, the severity of these impacts highlights the significant need for accelerated federal support. Given the urgent need for action, I respectfully request your Administration's assistance in prioritizing federal disaster supplemental funding to support Virginia's recovery needs.

In the immediate aftermath of the storm, 310,000 Virginia residents were without power and electric distribution infrastructure was severely damaged. In terms of transportation impact, 484 primary and secondary roads, as well as 118 bridges were closed. As of November 12th, FEMA has had more than 10,000 applications for Individual Assistance and almost 3,000 requests for inspection of damaged or destroyed homes. A financial commitment to rebuilding housing will be critical to the survival of some of these communities and we are hopeful that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development will recognize this important need.

Southwest Virginia has long been home to a thriving agricultural community. As of late October, nearly 3,700 farms had been impacted by the storm resulting in more than \$630M in direct, indirect and future financial impact to Virginia farmers and their communities. Additionally, Southwest Virginia is home to numerous small and local businesses that have been critically impacted. The Virginia Economic Development Partnership has conducted an economic impact analysis focusing on wide-ranging disruptions resulting in direct and indirect economic impacts of more than \$2.0 billion across this region.

In addition to significant individual losses, our localities have also been severely impacted. Each of these communities has begun the process of applying for Public Assistance through FEMA. We are sincerely hopeful that FEMA will receive ample funding to support these communities in rebuilding important community facilities and critical infrastructure.

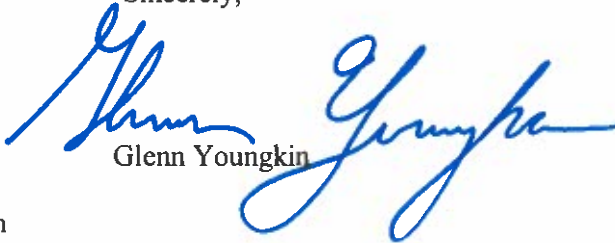
One vital priority within this recovery framework that requires rapid federal response is the Virginia Creeper Trail—a celebrated tourism asset and key driver of economic stability for the region. While local sections of the trail have reopened, the U.S. Forest Service-managed portion remains closed due to extensive damage, including the destruction of multiple trestles. The continued closure of this 17-mile section threatens the economic vitality of Southwest Virginia, as tourism and related businesses depend on the trail's accessibility. Recognizing the Creeper Trail serves as the economic engine for numerous communities in the region, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has included a specific funding request with the intent of expediting the return of this critical regional asset. We strongly support adequate and immediate funding to ensure that this occurs in the most expedited manner possible.

Our fellow Virginians have suffered an unimaginable impact from Hurricane Helene. They are resilient and their response in the face of this disaster has been inspiring. I have complete confidence that together, we will rebuild better and stronger than before. Helene represents one of the most significant natural disasters to impact the Commonwealth of Virginia in the past 40 years. During this time of need, support from our federal partners is critical.

Thank you for your responsiveness during the immediate aftermath of Helene and your continuing support to our citizens in rebuilding Southwest Virginia.

Please let me know if you or your team have any questions.

Sincerely,



Glenn Youngkin

cc: Virginia Congressional Delegation

Attachment (1)

Office of Hurricane Helene Recovery and Rebuilding

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

Hurricane Helene was a devastating tropical cyclone that caused widespread destruction and numerous fatalities across the Southeastern United States. After making landfall on September 26 in Florida, the storm moved inland, bringing wind gusts and historic levels of rainfall. The storm severely impacted 23 rural and agricultural-based localities in Southwest Virginia, covering nearly 8,000 square miles, a region home to a population of over 620,000.

The storm caused significant economic disruption to the region, damaged and destroyed homes and damaged and destroyed critical infrastructure to the Virginia transportation system, the region's public municipality systems, and Virginia national and state parks.

Based upon analysis from regional and local governments, the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) regional coordinators working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), as well as our partners in the Federal and State agencies, reported damage resulting from Hurricane Helene currently totals \$4.4 billion. The Commonwealth continues to work with our partners for ongoing assessments and identification of additional damages to Virginia's communities and businesses.

Economic

The Commonwealth, through the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP), conducted an in-depth economic impact assessment on the economic disruption associated with the storm. Over 310,000 Virginia residents were directly impacted. The direct economic cost of damages was \$1 billion, including \$159 million in agriculture damages (reflected under "Agriculture"). The total economic cost of the storm is over \$2.1 billion capturing lost revenue, unemployment, and future loss of investment.

The Department of Commerce (DOC) will be critical in fostering economic resilience by providing support in the form of Small Business Administration loans and Economic Adjustment Assistance (EAA) from the Economic Development Administration (EDA).

Housing

An unprecedented number of houses sustained damage from flooding, rainfall, and debris. Damage to housing is partially reflected by FEMA Individual Needs claims. As of November 12, 2024, nearly 2,700 homes have requested assistance from FEMA, and more are expected to apply through early December. Low flood insurance rates and substandard living conditions present challenges for rebuilding. Based upon feedback from impacted planning district commissions, localities, and the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), we have the potential of over \$500 million in damages to housing with additional costs forthcoming.

Immediate and flexible recovery funding through the Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program will be vital to long-term recovery and mitigation efforts as FEMA Individual Assistance is primarily used to address immediate needs.

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Transportation

Hurricane Helene has caused sizable damage to Virginia's transportation infrastructure, including roads, bridges, structures, and culverts. In the immediate aftermath of Helene, 484 roads and 118 bridges were closed. Currently, 12 roads remain closed.

Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) has a detailed process, whereby its engineers validate and assess every reported damage incident. After physically inspecting all structure, the agency determined that the storm damaged 735 roadways, 89 structures, 26 bridges, and 63 culverts.

Repairing the damage to critical transportation systems will require increased reimbursement for standard disaster-related costs and full reimbursement for near-term costs under the Emergency Relief (ER) program from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

Infrastructure

Hurricane Helene caused significant damage to critical infrastructure in Southwest Virginia including water treatment facilities, sewage lines, municipal buildings, and drainage systems. FEMA has received 93 Registrations for Public Assistance (RPAs) to address damages to local infrastructure. FEMA has approved 19 RPAs. VDEM initial estimates suggest a total infrastructure damage of \$340 million.

Federal support through the Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program will be vital to efforts to rebuild public infrastructure.

Agriculture

Initial damage assessment figures prepared by the Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) and including input from the Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF) stood at more than \$174 million across 3,700 farms, based on direct losses and replacement values. The value of future income loss is estimated at an additional \$51 million. Direct damages and the discounted stream of future years' income total at least \$225 million in losses. This is primarily due to land taken out of production by Hurricane Helene.

In addition to present and future losses experienced by farmers and landowners, there are regional economic impacts from farmers' lost income. The indirect and future effect of Hurricane Helene's impact on farm and forest landowners is between \$191 and \$405 million.

The comprehensive estimate of all agricultural and forestry losses is estimated at \$416 to \$630 million.

Virginia will request support from the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), including the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Farm Service Agency (FSA) for crop loss, stream debris removal, and agricultural land restoration. Additionally, increased access to low-interest FSA Emergency Farm loans will provide essential financial support to farmers affected by the disaster.

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Parks and Recreation

The Virginia Tourism Commission (VTC) projects substantial visitor spending loss this year. The Virginia Creeper Trail is a 34-mile rail-trail, 17 miles of which is federally owned. Tourism generated by the Creeper Trail (250,000 visitors per year) sustains the economies of multiple localities, including the communities of Abingdon and Damascus. 18 trestles have been lost (either destroyed or washed away) and extended sections of the trail itself no longer exist.

Other state parks sustained significant infrastructure damages, namely the New River State Park. This includes Claytor Lake, which is currently closed due to excessive debris.

For assistance with rebuilding park infrastructure and revitalizing local tourism, Virginia requests funding from the US Forest Service and the Department of Interior (DOI), including the National Park Service (NPS).

Southwest Virginia Estimated Needs and Potential Sources

Category (\$ Millions)	Direct/Indirect	Strengthening & Mitigation ⁽¹⁾	Total	Federal Agency / Potential Sources
Economy	\$1,941		\$1,941	HUD: CDBG, CDBG - DR SBA: Disaster Loans
Housing	\$500	\$75	\$575	HUD: CDBG, CDBG - DR
Transportation	\$131	\$20	\$151	FHWA, FEMA
Infrastructure	\$340	\$51	\$391	FEMA: Pubic Assistance, Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, Community Loan Program, Special Disaster Assistance Loan
Agriculture	\$630	\$94	\$724	NRCS: Emergency Watershed Protection, FSA: Emergency Farm Loans
Parks and Recreation	\$509	\$76	\$585	USFS, NPS
Helene Subtotal	\$4,051	\$316	\$4,367	

(1) Strengthening & Mitigation calculated using FEMA's incentivized match ratio.

Note: Preliminary damage assessments from Commonwealth Secretariats, agency leadership, and various state and federal sources.