

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 30, 2024

The Honorable Deanne Criswell
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street SW
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Administrator Criswell,

We are just beginning to understand the scope of damage Hurricane Helene wrought across the Southeast. Historic levels of rain fall and flooding have hit Western North Carolina. Lives have been lost, homes have been destroyed, and communities have likely been forever changed. There is no doubt that the road to recovery will be long and difficult. We need every relevant federal agency with a role to play in the recovery to coordinate swiftly and effectively.

As part of that effort, we must work to quickly remove storm debris to reopen travel, particularly to help those with health emergencies. Thousands of Western North Carolinians live in private communities that are only accessible through private roads. We must remove debris and reopen those roads so emergency vehicles can access these residents.

As you know, President Biden granted a Major Disaster Declaration for the State of North Carolina on September 28, 2024.¹ Under certain circumstances the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) may make Public Assistance Program funding available for debris removal on private property. These circumstances are “based on the severity of the disaster and whether debris on private property is so widespread that it threatens public health and safety or the economic recovery of the community.”² Western North Carolina has many geographically isolated private communities. Hurricane Helene’s historic flooding and damage to electric and communications infrastructure has further isolated these communities. Reaching these remote residents must be a top priority.

We therefore request that you make private communities in Western North Carolina eligible for Public Assistance Program funding and that you quickly approve their requests for timely debris removal. The safety of these residents is further jeopardized the longer their communities remain isolated due to inaccessible roads.

We appreciate your consideration of this request and stand ready to work with you and all other federal officials to respond to this catastrophic situation in North Carolina.

Sincerely,



Ted Budd
United States Senator



Thom Tillis
United States Senator

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2024/09/28/president-joseph-r-biden-jr-approves-north-carolina-disaster-declaration-3/>

² <https://www.fema.gov/fact-sheet/private-property-debris-removal-0#:~:text=Debris%20removal%20from%20private%20property,under%20FEMA's%20Public%20Assistance%20Program.>