

General Assembly Approves Second Round of Hurricane Helene Relief

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On October 24th, The General Assembly convened in Raleigh to pass the second Hurricane Helene relief bill, Senate Bill 743.

The House and Senate passed the legislation unanimously, and it will become effective when Governor Cooper signs it into law. On October 23rd, Governor Cooper released a

Preliminary Damage and Needs Assessment, which included his recovery recommendations. The Governor's assessment included a proposed \$3.9 billion in appropriations and included long-term recovery and resiliency initiatives.

Senate Bill 743 appropriated a total of \$644 million, with \$604 million appropriated from the state's Savings Reserve and \$40 million will from the Office of State Budget and Management Disaster Relief Reserve. The first relief bill, which became law on October 10th, appropriated \$273 million from the State's Savings Reserve.

The \$644 million in appropriations includes:

- Additional nonrecurring state matching funds will be sent to NCEM to draw down additional federal funding assistance.
- \$50M nonrecurring to NCEM to be disbursed to local governments and state agencies for "unmet needs not covered by insurance or available federal aid."
- \$100M for local government cash flow loans to be administered by the Local Government Commission.
- An additional \$5.5M to NCLM, NCACC, and the COGs for added technical assistance resources for local governments to be used to assist with federal financial aid applications, technical support for planning and permitting, and technical support for adding capacity for building and trade inspections.
- \$50M to DPI for repair and renovation of school facilities, which fully funds their request list.
- \$5M to DPI for technology needs at impacted schools, namely replacement of lost devices.
- \$5M to DPI to replace school cafeteria equipment.
- \$5M for additional mental health support within public schools.
- Various funding sources for tuition grants and building repairs within the UNC System and Community College System.
- \$12M nonrecurring to DPH for local government health departments, specifically to assist them with restoring essential functions, including private well water quality endeavors and other environmental

health initiatives.

- \$25M to DHHS for mental health crisis support for individuals with IDD.
- \$10M NR for Smart Start Partnerships to facilitate reopening and repairs of childcare centers in impacted counties.
- \$1M to DSS to distribute funds to county social services departments for rental assistance.
- \$50M for small business recovery bridge loans, to be administered by Golden Leaf.
- \$5M to Visit NC to encourage the return of tourism to WNC at the appropriate time.
- \$100M for emergency loans to local governments for water/wastewater infrastructure repairs and \$7M for technical assistance for the design of these new systems.
- \$22M for bridge loans for underground storage tank repairs.
- \$5M nonrecurring to NCEM for revision of floodplain maps in impacted counties.
- Funds to cover line of duty death benefits for first responders.

The legislation also contains:

- A provision to allow local governments impacted by the storm to go beyond statutory timelines/deadlines for permit issuance and building inspections.
- Language encouraging the use of historically underutilized business vendors in the provision of services and goods using relief funding.
- Additional school calendar flexibility within impacted counties.
- Authorization to use certain permitted mines as temporary debris disposal sites.
- Allows agencies the flexibility to extend deadlines and provide regulatory flexibility for employment-related certifications.
- Extension of administrative deadlines for certain death benefits.
- A handful of technical corrections to the first Helene relief package.

The Ward and Smith Government Relations Team continues to work directly with House and Senate leadership, as well as lawmakers from the impacted counties, to make certain that this series of relief packages addresses the ongoing needs of our mountain communities.

The General Assembly will reconvene on November 19th, at which time we anticipate the passage of additional relief legislation to further assist in rebuilding western North Carolina.

Ward and Smith stands ready to assist businesses, local governments, and industry organizations as we work together to recover from Hurricane Helene. We know that together, we are **#WNCStrong**.

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