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PHILIP D. MURPHY
GOVERNOR

July 28, 2023

President Joseph R. Biden
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

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), as implemented by 44 C.F.R. § 206.36, I hereby request that you declare a Major Disaster Declaration for the State of New Jersey (State) as a result of the storms that began impacting the State on July 15, 2023. This request is timely under 44 CFR § 206.36(a).

I submit this request in light of the recent and ongoing damages of the severe storms that brought heavy rains, high winds, and flash flooding activity that began impacting the State and, in particular, Warren County, on July 15, 2023 (the July 15 Storm). The impacts of the July 15 Storm were severe and far more impactful than other, typical summer storms.

The rains accompanying this storm have overwhelmed Warren County's inland waterways. The July 15 Storm's impacts were exacerbated by pre-existing saturation resulting from recent rainfall in the area. In parts of Warren County, it is estimated that more than a month's worth of rain, as much as 7 or more inches, fell in mere hours. As a result, numerous towns within Warren County experienced flash flooding that has overwhelmed roadways, destabilized existing waterways and stormwater systems, and resulted in severe damages to homes, vehicles, businesses, public facilities, and other infrastructure.

On July 27, 2023, the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management and Warren County agencies began joint damage assessments with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). While damage assessments are still ongoing, it is clear that the July 15 Storm's damages will far exceed the minimum damage thresholds established pursuant to the Stafford Act. Therefore, this storm will require federal assistance to the State of New Jersey and Warren County.

Because of the severe impacts of the July 15 Storm, I request a Major Disaster Declaration for the State of New Jersey and Warren County. Furthermore, I request financial assistance for eligible Category A (debris removal), Category B (emergency protective measures), and Categories C-G (permanent work) expenses under the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Public Assistance program, as well as Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funding. My request is supported by the following factors.

I. The Situation is Beyond the Capability of the State and Affected Local Governments and Requires Supplementary Federal Emergency Assistance to Save Lives and Protect Property, Public Health and Safety, and/or to Lessen or Avert the Threat of a Disaster.

The July 15, 2023 Storm began impacting New Jersey as a severe summer storm with torrential rains and high winds. Preliminary rainfall totals indicate that, within a matter of hours, as much as 7 inches of rain fell in several areas of Warren County, New Jersey. These rains added to existing ground saturation resulting from other recent storms impacting the State.

The severe rainfall combined with previously saturated grounds to produce significant inland flooding that has substantially interfered with commerce and transportation. Dozens of State, county, and local roads were damaged and blocked by floodwaters, rock slides, soil, and/or downed trees. Numerous homes have been flooded across Warren County, with vehicles submerged and businesses impacted by the fast-rising waters. The State declared a State of Emergency on July 16, 2023 to address the significant impacts of the storm.

The deluge of rain also resulted in massive amounts of debris blocking major highways and local roads throughout Warren County. For instance, U.S. Route 46, the major thoroughfare providing transportation along the Delaware River in Warren County, was completely shut down in one area due to thousands of tons of rocks, trees, and soil covering the highway. Work to remove the debris and re-open the vital highway is ongoing and will require repairs to a damaged stream bank and stabilization of nearby mountainside.

The July 15 Storm's damage has had an outsized impact on Warren County, and has stressed local, county, and State resources to help respond. The severity of the damage from this event is beyond the capability of the State and affected local governments.

II. Confirmation that the Governor Has Taken Appropriate Action Under Law and Directed the Execution of the State Emergency Plan.

On July 16, 2023, I issued Executive Order No. 336 declaring a State of Emergency

for all 21 New Jersey Counties due to the existing and impending impacts of severe storms that began impacting the State on July 15, 2023. By this Executive Order, I authorized the State Director of Emergency Management, who is the Superintendent of State Police, to implement the State Emergency Operations Plan and to direct the activation of county and municipal emergency operations plans, as necessary, and to coordinate the recovery effort from this emergency with all governmental agencies, volunteer organizations, and the private sector.

III. Information Describing the State and Local Efforts and Resources Which Have Been or Will Be Used to Alleviate the Emergency.

On July 15, 2023, the State Emergency Operations Plan was activated with all Emergency Support Functions fully staffed. On the same date, Warren County activated its Emergency Operations Center to help respond to the various impacts of the storm.

Fire Departments, Emergency Medical Services, and Local and State Police officers have been responding to numerous calls for service to address the numerous challenges related to the storm, such as flooded roadways and road closures related to the dynamic weather conditions.

Local Public Works Crews and NJ Department of Environmental Protection staff have been assisting with clearing debris from roadways and critical infrastructure.

IV. Information Describing Other Federal Agency Efforts and Resources Which Have Been or Will Be Used in Responding to this Incident.

None at this time. The Governors Authorized Representative, State Coordinating Officer, and Deputy State Coordinating Officer will coordinate disaster assistance with Federal resources.

V. Identification of the Type and Extent of Additional Federal Aid Required.

To help expedite the State's response to and recovery from the impacts of the July 15 Storm, I request financial assistance in the form of reimbursements for eligible Category A (debris removal) and Category B (emergency protective measures) and Category C through G (permanent work) expenses under FEMA's Public Assistance Program. I also request the activation of Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funding to help fund projects that will prevent the types of damages from the July 15 Storm from occurring again in the future. In support of these requests, I provide the following:

- The July 15 Storm's preliminary impacts resulted in a significant amount of rainfall, resulting in downed trees and flooding of roadways which have required and will continue to require a substantial amount of debris removal activity.

- The storm also flooded existing waterways and stormwater management systems. As a result, we expect the need to make substantial repairs to natural waterways, man-made waterways, and to related critical infrastructure that were severely impacted by the event.
- Over the last several years, the State has been severely impacted by the following events which resulted in a FEMA Major Disaster Declaration:
 - COVID-19 Pandemic (DR-4488-NJ);
 - Tropical Storm Isaias (DR-4574-NJ);
 - Winter Storm Orlena (DR-4597-NJ); and
 - Tropical Storm Ida (DR-4614-NJ).

These events and their ongoing recovery efforts continue to stress the available local, county, and State resources of New Jersey.

These programs are necessary and critical for the safety and well-being of the people of New Jersey to ensure a full and swift recovery from this event.

I certify that, for this disaster, State, county and municipal governments will assume all applicable non-federal shares of costs required by the Stafford Act.

In addition, pursuant to 42 U.S.C. 5170b and 5173, regarding debris removal, the State agrees to indemnify the federal government for any claims arising from the removal of the debris or wreckage for this disaster.

VI. Conclusion

As this event evolves, I reserve the right to amend this request to include additional FEMA programs.

I am urging the prompt approval of this request and the full support of the Federal government to respond to this disaster on behalf of the people of the State of New Jersey.

Sincerely,



Phillip D. Murphy
Governor

Enclosures