

United States Senate

September 23, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Through: George A. Robinson
Regional Administrator
FEMA Region VI
800 North Loop 288
Denton, TX 76209-3698

Dear Mr. President,

In accordance with 44 C.F.R. §206.47(d), I am requesting that the federal government provide one hundred percent (100%) federal funding for emergency work under Section 403 and Section 407 of the Stafford Act for the State of Louisiana, including Direct Federal Assistance during the initial period after this disaster. This request is based upon the devastation to many Louisiana communities caused by Hurricane Laura, designated as FEMA-4559-DR-LA.

Hurricane Laura caused major damage to private homes and public facilities and state and local governments are incurring significant costs associated with maintaining and preserving public health and safety. Weeks after Hurricane Laura made landfall, local, state and federal personnel are still assessing damages from this storm. Well over 800,000 yards of debris were estimated by FEMA to have been caused by the storm. While much of this debris was primarily in the southwest parishes of Louisiana, the debris trail, which has blocked roads, damaged and destroyed buildings, and blocked access to critical facilities, extends well into Central and Northern Louisiana.

Over 600,000 citizens were without power in the immediate aftermath of the storm and power still has yet to be restored to tens of thousands of residents nearly a month after Hurricane Laura made landfall. Dozens of water systems throughout the impacted areas were also damaged with many of those systems being incapable of providing fresh water to its customers.

Unfortunately, a great number of Hurricane Laura survivors suffered major or catastrophic damage to their homes and communities and have therefore been displaced for weeks before they have been able to attempt to return home to assess their damages and rebuild. Sheltering operations have been in place for a longer period of time than with other storms. Furthermore, in order to mitigate further spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, those sheltering operation have largely been conducted in non-congregate settings (such as hotels), which has greatly exacerbated the normal costs associated with sheltering.

In response to Hurricane Laura, all parishes were included for emergency protective measures in the President's major disaster declaration. These emergency protective measures have been vital in preventing additional damage to public facilities that had damaged or destroyed roofs and preserve those facilities that remain salvageable.

The catastrophic damage caused by Hurricane Laura, which made landfall as a Category 4 storm with sustained winds of 150 miles per hour, and was the first hurricane in memory to maintain hurricane strength as it travelled through Louisiana's northern parishes, has over-extended the capacity of most of the parishes, cities, and towns to respond to the economic devastation caused by the impact of this hurricane. These communities have limited resources to respond and recover from a disaster of this magnitude. Without additional assistance the twenty-five percent (25%) cost share required under Public Assistance will cripple many local economies, slowing the recovery process and preventing many communities from completing necessary repairs.

While the prompt federal assistance and relief efforts by FEMA and other federal agencies to assess the damages and needs of our Louisiana citizens is commendable, there is no doubt that much more needs to be done before there is anything resembling a return to normalcy in the hardest hit communities impacted by Hurricane Laura. It is worth pointing out that this hurricane was the strongest to hit the State of Louisiana in over 150 years. A stronger federal commitment to help people and communities recover from this cataclysmic hurricane is therefore required and we strongly request that the Administration authorize 100% federal funding for those emergency protective measures and debris removal operations completed during the immediate response to Hurricane Laura and a reasonable period of time thereafter as was done in the aftermath of Hurricane Michael.

Thank you for your prompt consideration of this request and we are happy to provide additional information and justification for this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Cassidy, M.D." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bill Cassidy, M.D.
United States Senator