

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 16, 2023

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

Dear Mr. President:

We write in full support of Maine Governor Janet Mills' request for a Major Disaster Declaration for 10 of Maine's 16 counties: Androscoggin, Franklin, Hancock, Kennebec, Oxford, Penobscot, Piscataquis, Somerset, Waldo, and Washington.

As demonstrated in the Governor's request, it is clear that each of these counties experienced substantial damages that collectively exceed the State's capabilities. The storm that entered Maine on December 17 brought wind gusts of nearly 70 miles per hour and more than 2.5" of rain. The multi-day, multi-hazard event caused countless downed trees and power lines across the state, left nearly 420,000 Mainers without power, and resulted in widespread flooding. We received a number of reports of possible gas leaks, contaminated water, and other related hazards and anticipate a lengthy recovery effort.

As you know, Maine currently has multiple open Disaster Declarations for 2023, and towns throughout the state are struggling with mitigation and infrastructure repair costs. In the Somerset County town of Skowhegan, most roads in and out of town were submerged and impassable. As the Wyman Dam released excess water, the Towns of Madison and Fairfield also remained in high water condition, with bridges closed in Madison, Norridgewock, and Skowhegan. Parts of Lewiston, a community still grappling with the aftermath of the state's deadliest mass shooting that occurred in October, were placed under a flood evacuation order.

On December 19, Governor Mills declared a State of Civil Emergency for these counties, and shortly afterward, the Maine Emergency Management Agency requested the assistance of the Federal Emergency Management Agency to assess the widespread, catastrophic damage.

While flood waters have now receded, there is substantial damage left in their wake. For example, the Town of Newry received 7" of rain during the course of the storm; snowmobile trails, which are vital to the region's economy, were devastated.

According to a recent study conducted by the Professional Logging Contractors of the Northeast, the storm resulted in more than \$2.5 million in economic losses for Maine's logging industry, primarily lost revenue due to muddy, unstable conditions related to water-saturated ground. In fact, the PLC estimates that damages could be projected at as much as \$5 million to \$6 million, as logging companies are unable to operate until the ground freezes again or dries up in the spring.

Due to extensive damage across the stated region, the Governor requested Public Assistance (PA) categories A through G, and Z, for the counties of Androscoggin, Franklin, Hancock, Kennebec, Oxford, Penobscot Piscataquis, Somerset, Waldo, and Washington. Governor Mills has also requested Individual Assistance (IA) for the counties of Androscoggin, Franklin, Kennebec, Oxford, and Somerset, as well as Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funding for use statewide. Rainfall began the evening of December 17, 2023 across Western Maine, traveling north and east throughout the night, with a strong low-pressure system moving across the state the following day. This created intensely damaging storm conditions including rainfall, rapid snowmelt, partially frozen ground, and pre-saturated soils resulting in catastrophic flooding and the deaths of four people.

In addition to the prolonged power outages due to high flood waters and damaged roads, Oxford County and Androscoggin County each had instances of municipal evacuations. Approximately 80 residents and staff at a nursing home in Oxford County were temporarily evacuated due to flood waters, and there were multiple water rescues documented.

Dozens of schools, municipal offices, and businesses were closed December 18 and 19, with some businesses closing indefinitely, and more than 100 residences were displaced and sought shelter assistance from the American Red Cross. Preliminary damages for the Public Assistance program were estimated at more than \$20 million across the 10 counties referenced in this request and two Tribal Nations with territory within the borders of these counties.

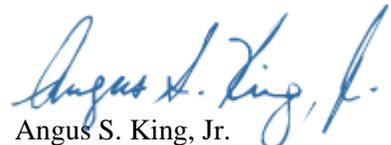
The State has verified that the damaged infrastructure included in the validation process is not eligible for commercially available insurance coverage, placing all repair costs on local government taxpayers if federal assistance is not obtained. Due to the extent of infrastructure damages, State resources are not adequate to meet local recovery needs.

We urge you to expeditiously approve Governor Mills' request for Major Disaster Declarations for the counties in question. Expedited review is especially warranted as many of these areas have been affected by other disasters, some natural, some economic, all of which have made this a particularly difficult year for the region. The people of Maine are in great need of this federal assistance, and we thank you for your support.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



Jared F. Golden
Member of Congress