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The Recap

Dear League Members,

The last several days have been truly harrowing for North Carolina as Hurricane Helene brought unprecedented levels of rainfall and destruction to our state, especially in our western communities. Disasters like this can leave us feeling helpless and hopeless. But I can say without hesitation that I have hope and confidence in our ability to recover – time and time again, our cities and towns have proven that the government closest to residents is the most powerful. I have seen countless images of municipal workers from across the state traveling to western North Carolina to help with search and rescue efforts, security and transportation, restoring power and water systems, and much, much more. I am filled with pride to be a part of our collective network of cities and towns who, despite having strained resources of their own, are at the ready to help their neighbors now and into the future. It is a heartening real-time demonstration of our motto – working as one, advancing all.

The League's staff has been busy behind the scenes in its response to Hurricane Helene. The Risk Management Services Claims team has activated our CAT Response Plan and is at the ready to respond to members of the Property & Casualty Trust as coverage questions and claims start pouring in. Likewise, our field staffers have been in communication with affected members to determine needs and next steps. We have also been in communication with the State Emergency Management officials and offered our assistance with amplifying their important directives, updates and other information – watch our social media channels and [Hurricane Helene landing page for updates as we receive them](#).

Thank you to all of our member cities and towns who have already sent mutual aid, and to our neighbors in western North Carolina, please know that our hearts and prayers are with you.

Mark-Anthony Middleton



State Lawmakers Plan Disaster Response

State legislative leaders this week pledged an initial legislative response to address disaster recovery needs in areas affected by Hurricane Helene. “The General Assembly is evaluating what a disaster recovery package could look like and what other steps we can take. North Carolina has a healthy savings account that will help us respond to the catastrophic nature of this storm,” NC Senate President Pro Tem Phil Berger stated on social media earlier this week.

Members of the NC General Assembly were already slated to return to Raleigh for a brief session beginning next Wednesday. While that session currently has restrictions on the types of bills legislators may consider, legislators can vote to broaden the scope of the session to include a potential disaster relief bill.

Legislative leaders have solicited suggestions from the League and other local government groups for ways to assist in the immediate disaster response. Specific funding requests will likely come later this year as needs can be better assessed. For now, if you have other suggestions regarding state laws that should be modified to assist your city and its operations during this disaster recovery time, please send them to NCLM Director of Government Affairs Erin Wynia at ewynia@nclm.org.

FEMA Funding

As the all-of-government response to Hurricane Helene takes place in North Carolina’s western counties, federal officials are providing assurances that the Federal Emergency Management Agency will be able to meet immediate assistance needs well into December. With Congress acting on a continuing budget resolution funding the federal government through Dec. 20, [FEMA officials said the stop-gap measure puts them in a “good position”](#) to fully respond through that timeframe. [A letter to U.S. Senate leaders from senators in the affected states, including North Carolina U.S. Sens. Thom Tillis and Ted Budd, said that calling Congress back into session in late October to address long-term assistance needs should not be out of the question.](#) “Tens of millions of Americans were impacted by Hurricane Helene, and we look forward to working with you to provide relief to those impacted by this horrific storm,” the letter stated. While U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson indicated that reconvening Congress ahead of the election was not needed, he did say that Congress will need to appropriate additional money for recovery. Among the many steps at the federal and state level that should help local communities, President Biden announced that FEMA would cover all costs for debris removal for the next three months, meaning there will be no local 25 percent match required for eligible work. The National League of Cities, meanwhile, is urging Congress to take quick action to address disasters across the US, including the damage caused by Helene. [In a letter to Congressional Leaders](#), NLC CEO Clarence Anthony also urged flexibility for federal road assistance so that

those dollars could also be used for repairs of non-federal roads, something that may prove critical for repairs in western North Carolina.

Policy Listening Sessions

NCLM is set to conclude its policy listening sessions next week, and just as in the sessions two years ago, these gatherings have enjoyed tremendous participation as League members have advanced ideas that will ultimately be fashioned into the organization's policy goals for the next legislative biennium. As of Thursday, more than 200 municipal officials representing more than 160 municipalities had participated in the sessions.

Participants were able to attend events in Asheville, Concord, Rocky Mount and Elon. Sessions were also held for the NCLM Board of Directors and the NC Mayors Association, as well as a virtual session open for all members. Events were also scheduled today for the NC Metro Mayors Coalition and next week for the NC Black Elected Municipal Officials.

With ideas in hand generated from these meetings – covering housing, transportation, public safety, internal operations and other topics – the League's Policy Committee will now meet to begin synthesizing and paring down the ideas. That list will then be presented to the Board of Directors and ultimately the full membership, with the formulated policy goals then be pursued before the General Assembly in 2025-26. We want to thank everyone for their participation in these meetings, as that participation reinforces that these are the collective priorities of all North Carolina cities and towns.

PFAS Groundwater Rule Heads to Public Comment

North Carolina's Environmental Management Commission (EMC) voted last month to move ahead with new [proposed groundwater standards](#) for PFAS. The public comment period on the proposed rule is scheduled to start in November before heading back to the EMC for final approval sometime next year. The proposed rule would establish goals for groundwater contamination cleanup and limit continued releases of PFAS into groundwater.

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are among the family of man-made forever chemicals that have been found in water systems across the state and become a subject of concern for regulators over the past several years. The proposed groundwater rule would be primarily aimed at legacy compounds: PFOS, PFOA, and GenX. Nearly 80% of the 2,300 Public Water Systems rely on groundwater as a drinking source, with many of those systems serving small, rural communities with fewer ratepayers.

This advancement comes on the heels of a months-long struggle between the NC Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the EMC over PFAS regulation for groundwater and surface water standards. Since surface water and groundwater usually become drinking water in NC, DEQ's proposed standards aim to complement new PFAS drinking water regulations enacted by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) earlier in 2024. Those regulations set maximum-contaminant levels (MCLs) for PFAS and put new enforcements on water utility systems.

Legislature Passes Budget Adjustment; Governor Vetoes

Following the General Assembly's failure to approve a full budget adjustment bill this year, legislators returned to Raleigh in early September to pass a smaller appropriations package that included \$240 million more for private school vouchers, \$377 million in additional Medicaid dollars, and provide for public school and community college enrollment increases. Gov. Roy Cooper promptly vetoed the bill, saying the additional school voucher money would damage public schools and is a [threat to public education](#).

The veto of [HB 10 Require ICE Cooperation & Budget Adjustments](#), which also includes a provision intended to force county sheriffs to better cooperate with U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement actions, sets up a veto override vote later this month or later in the year.



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