



February 7, 2024

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Through: Robert J. Fenton, Jr.
Regional Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency Region IX
1111 Broadway, Suite 1200
Oakland, CA 94607-4052

Dear Mr. President,

I write to request a Major Disaster Declaration (MDD) for Individual Assistance, pursuant to 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 Title 44 of the Code of Federal Regulations (44 C.F.R.) § 206.36, due to a severe winter storm and flooding that impacted San Diego County, California from January 21, 2024, through January 23, 2024. Because the most significant impacts of the widespread flooding and devastation caused by this winter storm event are being shouldered by individuals living in the most vulnerable areas within the County, I am requesting the Individuals and Households Program, Disaster Case Management, Crisis Counseling Assistance and Training Program, Disaster Legal Services, Disaster Unemployment Assistance, Voluntary Agency Coordination, and the Cora Brown Fund.

Incident Overview

This January 2024 winter storm brought approximately 3 inches of rain within 3 hours. At the height of the storm on January 22, parts of San Diego received up to 2.14 inches of rain in one hour. The National Weather Service (NWS) reported January 22 as San Diego's wettest January day on record and fourth wettest day overall since 1850.¹ The influx of rain caused tributaries to the San Diego

¹ NWS Weather Summary



River to overflow, sending debris into the river. With a flood stage at 10 feet, water flow surpassed 11 feet, causing significant damages to community infrastructure and housing to the most at risk populations.

On January 22, 2024, San Diego County declared a local emergency because of the impacts of this storm event. The San Diego Police Department reported 112 rescue calls, 182 flood responses, and 60 road closures, while the San Diego Fire Department reported 148 water/flood rescues. Additionally, there have been two confirmed fatalities as a direct result of this storm, with one additional fatality still under investigation, which is presumed to be storm related.

The San Diego Gas and Electric Company reported 13 unplanned outages, impacting 13,626 people. At the height of the storm on January 22, peak sheltering populations reached over 600 residents. As of February 6, 2024, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) reported that one congregate shelter remains open with 86 individuals overnight, and 1 non-congregate shelter with 7 individuals.

Exacerbating the extreme conditions impacting County residents, several freeways were shut down on January 22, including portions of Highways 78, 15, 94, and 5. Many surface streets were also deemed impassible due to mud and other debris and the San Diego Transit Authority reported damages to retaining walls, further impacting individual's ability to commute across the County. Over 100 businesses have reported impacts from the storm including flooding. Additionally, nine agricultural entities within the County reported \$340,600 in losses.

Voluntary agencies such as Team Rubicon, American Red Cross, the Salvation Army, and many more have been actively assisting survivors in San Diego County. As of February 5, 2024, over 4,400 requests for services have come in through 211 San Diego, a local nonprofit, and the Spring Valley Local Assistance Center (LAC). The San Diego Voluntary Agencies Active in Disaster has been coordinating services such as distribution of food boxes, bus passes, gas vouchers, hygiene kits, laundry service, hotel vouchers, donated item distribution (clothing and household items), financial assistance, debris clean up and minor storm home repairs, mold suppression equipment/supplies, and legal services for renters.

IMPACTS TO POPULATION AND COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Vulnerable communities in San Diego County experienced the most devastation as evidenced through the Preliminary Damage Assessments (PDA) conducted by the State of California, the Federal Emergency Management Agency

(FEMA), and the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), which began January 29, 2024, and concluded February 3, 2024.

While San Diego County has an overall moderate ranking of .53 on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Social Vulnerability Index (SVI), the communities most impacted by the January 2024 Winter Storm have a significantly higher SVI score. The average SVI score for these communities is .85. It is important to note that in the most impacted areas, there are 30,224 households with disabilities as well as 13 percent of households living below the poverty line, compared to the federal mark of 11.5 percent.

Additionally, during the PDAs, there were significant impacts observed at several schools in some of the hardest hit areas as a result of flooding. The damages include interior flooding in classrooms, significant damage to school buildings, and large amounts of debris in and around these schools. Five schools were significantly impacted in the City of San Diego. Additionally, two schools in National City and three schools in Spring Valley reported significant damage. More than 20 schools were forced to close, impacting over 10,000 students, with Bancroft Elementary School in Spring Valley still closed as of February 6, 2024. It is estimated that the total cost of repairs for these schools will exceed \$4,000,000.

With a national unemployment rate of 3.7%, the areas most impacted by the storm have unemployment rates of 4.3%, 4.71%, and 4.77%. Since the start of the storm, the California Employment Development Department has received over 800 claims for unemployment from these most impacted areas, and it anticipated that more claims will be received.

City of San Diego

The two most impacted areas within the City of San Diego, the 92113 and 92114 zip codes, have an overall SVI score of 0.88 and 0.9, respectively. Within the City of San Diego, 37.9 percent of households make less than the federal average of \$75,149, and 50 percent of households make less than \$100,000.

According to the County of San Diego Black Chamber of Commerce, the City of San Diego local businesses suffered damages, both physical and economical, as the flooding completely shut down the local trolley service. This is the main form of transportation for the City and, as the trolley system is still down as of February 6, 2024, it is completely cutting off much of their customer base and workforce. The most impacted communities within the city consists of mainly low-income single-family homes, underserved, and predominantly Spanish speaking individuals whose homes had significant damages due to flooding. Additionally, many survivors lost their vehicles during the flood making it

difficult to commute to and from work and access available services, adding to their distress and recovery challenges.

National City

The 91950 zip code of National City has the highest SVI score within the impacted areas with a score of 0.96. Within the city, 60.6 percent of households make less than the federal average of \$75,149, and 77 percent of households make less than \$100,000.

The majority of this city's residents are renters who do not have renters' insurance. The city primarily experienced the impact of flooding in low-income apartment complexes, housing underserved and predominantly Spanish speaking communities, with minimal to no flood insurance coverage. In Happy Hollow, a manufactured home park, 40 of the 90 units were damaged by flooding. This flooding caused a five foot water line throughout the damaged units. Due to lack of available housing, many residents of the community are still living in their flooded homes. Adjacent to this manufactured home park, an additional 22 units in an apartment complex were deemed uninhabitable due to severe damage.

Spring Valley

The most impacted zip code of Spring Valley, 91977, has an SVI score of 0.84. In Spring Valley, 37.4 percent of households make less than the federal average of \$75,149, and 51.4 percent of households make less than \$100,000.

The population in this area is disadvantaged, primarily Spanish speaking, and lacks flood insurance coverage. Of the 1,375 households that visited the Spring Valley LAC, 924 reported having no flood insurance.

Acute Impacts on Vulnerable Communities. According to the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), there are 8,063 active flood insurance policies in the County but only 4 percent of the active policies are located within the most impacted areas. Moreover, during the Joint-PDAs every resident that was spoken to stated they did not have flood insurance. San Diego County established an online damage assessment portal, which received 3,414 damage reports, with 1,179 reporting no level of insurance. After the Joint-PDA concluded on February 3, 2024, it was determined 595 homes suffered major damage, 208 homes suffered minor damage, and 55 homes were affected.

The concentration of damages within these economically disadvantaged areas disrupted electricity, water, and transportation services for several days. Despite

these challenges, the majority of the impacted residents have continued to remain in their damaged dwellings. While the impacts of this storm are still being endured, it is evident that, based on the vulnerability of the communities impacted and the limited resources in these communities, San Diego County will need additional resources and programs made available in order to recover from the January 2024 Winter Storm.

STATE FISCAL IMPACTS

In addition to the impacts to individuals and households, to date, the State and FEMA have also jointly concurred on nearly \$30.8 million in public infrastructure damages for this storm, which may be covered under the California Disaster Assistance Act (CDAA), the state's public assistance program.

Since the beginning of 2022, I have requested, and you have supported, 5 Major Disaster Declarations and an additional 13 state-only events for which I have proclaimed a State of Emergency and authorized CDAA funds. To date, these disasters have cost nearly \$3 billion.

CERTIFICATION

Pursuant to the California Emergency Services Act and in accordance with 44 CFR Section 206.361(1), I proclaimed a State of Emergency on January 23, 2024, for severe winter storms impacting San Diego County, and, among other ordering provisions, I directed appropriate action consistent with the State's emergency plan.

I certify for this Major Disaster Declaration request that the State and local governments will assume all applicable non-federal shared costs as required by the Stafford Act. I have designated the Director of the Cal OES, Nancy Ward, as the Governor's Authorized Representative (GAR) and State Coordinating Officer for this request. Director Ward is empowered to execute on behalf of the State all necessary documents for federal assistance and will work with FEMA in continuing to provide more information or justification on my behalf.

CONCLUSION

As established by the information set forth above, the most significant impacts of this January 2024 winter storm have been to the most vulnerable communities within San Diego County. As such, a Major Disaster Declaration for the Individual Assistance programs identified above is warranted. In addition, I am also requesting U.S. Small Business Administration disaster loans, funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Emergency Loan Program, and Hazard Mitigation assistance.

Sincerely,



Gavin Newsom
Governor of California