



STATE OF MARYLAND

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
Wes Moore

August 19, 2025

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
The President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Re: State of Maryland, Major Disaster Declaration Request for May 13-14 Severe Storms and Flash Flooding in Western Maryland

Dear Mr. President,

On July 22, 2025, the Federal government denied the State of Maryland's request for a Major Disaster Declaration submitted following devastating impacts and damages caused by heavy rainfall and flash flooding in May 2025. Pursuant to 44 CFR 206.46, this letter and attached documentation serves as the appeal to that decision.

Since May, local governments have led intensive recovery efforts. From the time the Emergency Operations Plan was activated on May 13 and the State of Emergency was declared, the State of Maryland has managed these efforts with interagency coordination, recovery programs, and funding. The next step is Federal support, which is both justified and required.

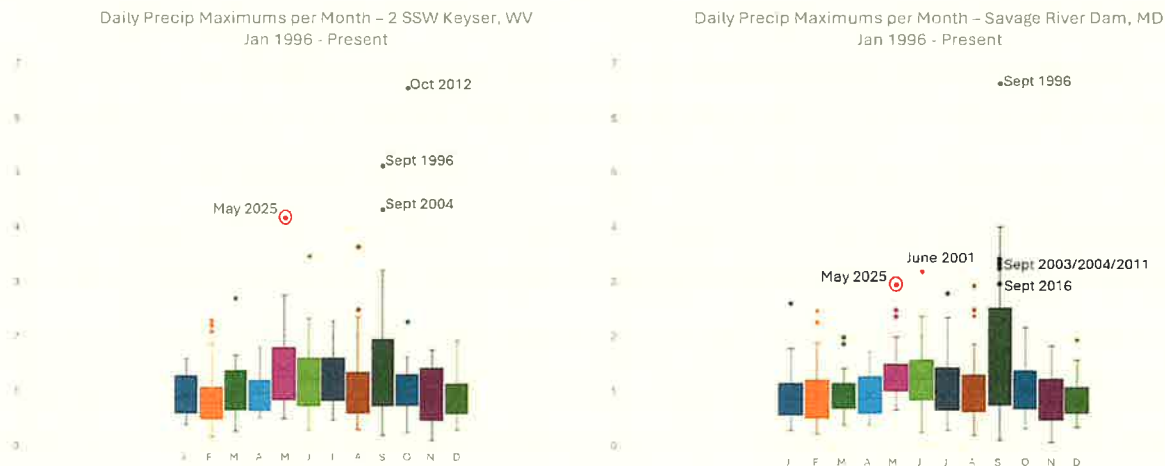
At the time of our original request, local jurisdictions and Maryland state agencies reported an estimated \$15.8 million in damages. As additional costs have been collected and documentation provided, there has been an additional \$17.9 million identified. The Maryland Department of Emergency Management vetted the data for eligibility under the FEMA Public Assistance program, insurance proceeds, and eligibility under other federal programs. MDEM in coordination with FEMA, subsequently determined the damage eligible under the Stafford Act is estimated at \$33.7 million, in Allegany and Garrett counties. This amount is nearly triple Maryland's statewide threshold, indicating the need for FEMA Public Assistance.

Allegany County's Fiscal Year 2026 overall budget was adopted at approximately \$147.7 million, marking a modest increase of about \$9.1 million from the previous year. To balance that budget, county leaders raised the income tax rate to Maryland's maximum of 3.2% (adding roughly \$1.7 million), eliminated 10 county positions (saving about \$775,000), and drew down around \$3.2 million from the fund-balance reserves.

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Absorbing a \$31.6 million recovery cost would equate to over 21% of the entire FY 2026 budget, placing an overwhelming and unplanned strain on county finances. Having just utilized reserves, raised income taxes, and enacted fiscal tightening to stay balanced, Allegany County would have virtually no flexibility left. Such a fiscal shock may force the county to make critical changes to capital improvements, slash services, or further reduce staffing. Absent Federal support, there could be risks to long-term financial stability.

Between May 12 and May 15, 2025, a nearly stationary low-pressure system over the Ohio River Valley brought prolonged severe weather to the Mid-Atlantic, especially Western Maryland. Moisture drawn from the Atlantic collided with the Appalachian Mountains, causing heavy rain and thunderstorms. From May 13–14, over 6 inches of rain fell in some areas leading to flash flooding in Garrett and Allegany counties. A Flash Flood Emergency was issued on May 13 for Westernport, Luke, and Barton due to life-threatening flooding. The floods caused road closures, evacuations, rescues, infrastructure damage, and school closures. Georges Creek in Westernport reached a near-record height of 12.41 feet, its second-highest level since records began, behind only the 1996 flood from Hurricane Fran. It returned below flood stage by 4:00 AM on May 14.



Box-and-whisker plots showing the distribution of daily maximum precipitation for Keyser, WV and Savage River Dam, MD for each month from January 1996 to present (30-year record). The event of May 13, 2025 produced the 4th greatest daily precipitation maximum at Keyser and tied for the 7th greatest at Savage River Dam within this period. At the Savage River Dam location, this also ranks as the 15th greatest daily precipitation measured since records began in January 1945 (80-year record), underscoring the event’s hydrometeorological significance. Keyser lies approximately 4.8 miles ESE of Westernport, MD, and Savage River Dam approximately 5.5 miles WNW.

Residents of Western Maryland, in both Allegany and Garrett counties, continue to experience the lasting impacts of the disaster. Many areas of Allegany County sustained damage to homes, schools, libraries, and other community hubs, making recovery more challenging for all residents, including children and seniors. For example, Westernport Elementary School was flooded during school hours, where 150 students and 50 staff members were moved to the second floor of the building until they were evacuated by swift water rescue teams. They were

taken to shelter in nearby schools, where some students had to stay overnight until it was safe enough for reunification with their families. Although the school is scheduled to open on time at the end of August, it is still undergoing repairs, with the first floor remaining closed due to significant damage, including the boiler and cafeteria.

With a new school year starting, there is no functioning boiler, which is a major concern due to the rapidly cooling temperatures Western Maryland experiences in September and October. Public school jurisdictions in Maryland can independently choose when to change thermostat temperatures for the seasons. The Department of Education recommends winter indoor temperatures remain between 68-75°F in classrooms and facilities that provide child care; most facilities in Maryland aim to stay within the 68-72°F range. As soon as indoor temperatures drop to 68°F, facilities will turn on the heat and hold the temperature around 70°F. With the average daily temperature being cooler during the school months, this has the potential to become a critical issue.

Monthly Average Temperatures in Westernport, Maryland, United States												
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Maximum	66°F	77°F	73°F	84°F	86°F	91°F	94°F	93°F	92°F	88°F	75°F	69°F
Mean maximum	60°F	67°F	71°F	81°F	85°F	88°F	91°F	90°F	87°F	83°F	71°F	62°F
Average high	39°F	45°F	51°F	61°F	70°F	78°F	84°F	82°F	76°F	66°F	51°F	43°F
Daily mean	31°F	36°F	41°F	51°F	61°F	69°F	74°F	72°F	66°F	56°F	42°F	36°F
Average low	24°F	28°F	32°F	42°F	52°F	60°F	65°F	64°F	57°F	48°F	33°F	29°F
Mean minimum	1°F	6°F	13°F	26°F	35°F	47°F	56°F	52°F	43°F	32°F	20°F	13°F
Minimum	-13°F	-4°F	5°F	22°F	28°F	40°F	54°F	49°F	35°F	28°F	16°F	3°F

Monthly average temperatures in Westernport, Maryland (Allegany County). The daily mean temperature for mid-September is 66°F, where boiler usage would be expected.

Despite ongoing repair efforts, the school will reopen the floors of the school that did not sustain damage to provide the children with a sense of normalcy. The cafeteria and kitchen is among the first floor damage, so breakfast and lunch will be brought in daily from another school. This arrangement has created unplanned building restructuring and expenses for the district, further straining the budget as efforts continue to restore the building to full functionality.

On May 13, 2025, Columbia Gas of Maryland made the decision to proactively shut down the entire natural gas system in Westernport as a safety measure to protect the public from potential hazards caused by rising floodwaters. For more than 24 hours, 116 residences, 21% of all residences, were without gas service. Natural gas systems are not designed to operate underwater, and as flood levels rose, gas lines and pressure regulators were submerged. To prevent system-wide failure and meet safety and regulatory standards, Columbia Gas of Maryland shut off the system as a precautionary measure. Floodwaters reaching furnaces and

water heaters pose serious risk; ignition systems of furnaces and water heaters can fail, allowing gas to flow without burning. This can lead to gas buildup, which may ignite unexpectedly, causing explosions or fires. The risk of hazardous conditions for residents and emergency operations was significantly reduced due to the decision of shutting gas off.

Columbia Gas of Maryland estimated over \$3.5 million in repairs and replacements for the entire Westernport gas system, as well as for major lines in Lonaconing and LaVale. Inspections and repair work began just days after the storm, but due to the severity of the damage, some customers remained without gas service for more than 45 days, with full restoration not completed until July 2025.

The communities most affected demonstrate heightened vulnerability in the face of disaster due to a combination of economic and social factors. Several rural jurisdictions, including Lonaconing, Midland, and Westernport, report median household incomes far below the state and national averages, with poverty rates reaching as high as 26.8 percent. These areas also show elevated percentages of residents with disabilities and significant proportions of older adults who may require additional assistance during recovery. Youth populations also make up a significant portion of the communities, further increasing the need for support in recovery. While language barriers are relatively low, the overall picture reflects communities with limited financial resources and heightened social needs, making effective disaster recovery efforts both urgent and complex.

Jurisdiction/ Location	Demographic Characteristics						
	Median Household Income	Population Living in Poverty	Pre-disaster unemploy- ment rate	65 years and older	18 years and younger	With a Disability	Who speak a language other than English
United States	\$77,719	12.5%	4.2%	17.7%	21.7%	13.6%	22.5%
Allegany County	\$54,384	19.8%	4.6%	21.5%	17.2%	23.6%	3.5%
Barton	\$54,063	10.1%	--	19.4%	25.5%	19.6%	1.1%
Lonaconing	\$43,947	26.8%	--	17.6%	23.6%	18.3%	3.4%
Midland	\$58,393	24.4%	--	10.4%	39.7%	14.3%	2.5%
Westernport	\$52,059	22.0%	--	16.0%	24.8%	14.2%	1.9%
Garrett County	\$69,031	11.0%	3.5%	23.6%	17.9%	18.7%	2.9%
Bloomington	\$67,500	4.0%	--	20.7%	27.0%	16.2%	4.7%

Since the initial declaration was submitted, the state, local governments and the communities have invested time, money and resources into recovery from this catastrophic flooding. The state has provided over \$459,000 to Allegany County for replacement of appliances, building supplies for home repairs, and assistance in paying for car repairs and insurance deductibles. The Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, with funding from the Maryland Department of Human Services, has committed \$1 million to replace furnaces

destroyed by flood waters, which was identified as a critical need in the area. State agencies continue to work with the communities to identify unmet needs and match to resources. The Local Department of Social Services, which is a state and local partnership, has provided \$85,000 in grants to also meet critical community needs. Finally, as a demonstration of resilience, \$70,000 in donations has been collected from the communities in Allegany County, which will go to assist their neighbors in need.

In addition to providing monetary support, the state and local governments are continuing to work with non-governmental organizations to provide support to the community. In the immediate days after the flooding, Crisis Clean-up was activated and led the Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) to provide muck-outs of homes that had flood damage. VOAD is in the early stages of assembling a Long Term Recovery Group, which will take the lead in long term disaster relief.

The state and local communities recognize the need to address damages from this storm in a way that will reduce impacts in future severe weather events. For example, Allegany County is addressing repairs in its sewer system caused by increasingly severe weather and flooding by proposing rebuilding the system to increase resilience and reliability in uncertain conditions. The focus is on Clarysville, a small community located about 1.5 miles south of Frostburg in the lowest area along US 40 west of LaVale. Approximately 2 million gallons of sanitary sewer flows through Clarysville each day on the way to LaVale. The current 15-inch gravity sewer is positioned between the toe of the slope for US 40 and Piney Mountain, crossing a floodplain and running alongside Braddock Run. Access to this sewer is difficult even during dry conditions, and routine inspection comes with extraordinary challenges. Although the County attempts to clear sanitary sewer easements every other year, this section remains especially challenging.

To resolve these issues, Allegany County is pursuing an innovative and forward-looking solution with the proposed Clarysville Pump Station and force main project. This initiative would relocate more than 10,000 linear feet of sanitary sewer into the US 40 road right-of-way. The relocation would eliminate access problems and significantly reduce the risk of damage caused by flooding along Braddock Run. By moving the sewer line out of the floodplain, the project would also eliminate both infiltration and exfiltration. The new force main, located in the shoulder of the state route, would be accessible for daily maintenance. Because development along this part of the US 40 corridor is limited due to steep slopes and the nearby Interstate 68, there are only a few existing sewer connections between Clarysville and LaVale. This makes the pump station and force main an efficient and practical solution.

The project includes a 6 million gallon-per-day pump station and approximately 10,000 linear feet of new sanitary sewer, with an estimated cost of \$25 million. This infrastructure upgrade is vital to the health and resilience of the Clarysville, LaVale, and surrounding communities. It reflects Allegany County's commitment to innovation and long-term resilience, while also delivering lasting benefits for Braddock Run and downstream residents.

Additionally, a new hydraulic study is about to begin to analyze flood impacts along Georges Creek, by removing abandoned railroad bridges using the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and FEMA model. The study will calculate flood elevations, velocities, and depth grids, and compare them to current conditions to assess changes. Under Section 8119 of the Water Resources

Development Act of 2022, the area is designated as an at-risk community and can receive assistance under the Planning Assistance to States (PAS) program. This project, in partnership with the USACE and Allegany County Department of Emergency Services demonstrates the community's commitment to understand its flood risk and make informed decisions to mitigate flooding.

Additionally, both Allegany and Garrett Counties have identified mitigation actions in their hazard mitigation plans in an effort to increase severe weather resilience. Allegany County's plan outlines a comprehensive approach, categorizing mitigation actions into Local Planning and Regulations, Structure and Infrastructure Projects, Education and Awareness Programs, and Natural Systems Protection. Specific initiatives aimed at enhancing severe weather resilience include the efforts to protect critical infrastructure from power outages through the potential development of microgrid systems and the installation of generators at vital water pump stations. Garrett County's plan complements these efforts by prioritizing structural retrofits to mitigate flood and winter weather vulnerabilities, upgrading storm water drainage systems, and ensuring continuous power supply to critical facilities through backup power solutions. These projects underscore the need for the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program to be awarded as part of this disaster.

Allegany County and MDEM have also begun coordination meetings with the University of Maryland and the National Weather Service to increase data collection that supports improved forecasting and public warning through Mesonet weather stations and Hydronet water level sensors. The terrain in the mountains has made forecasting and monitoring in the area difficult, and incorporation of these tools will improve these areas as well as tracking severe weather trends.

By identifying and taking corrective actions, post-disaster mitigation can help Allegany and Garrett Counties reduce future financial burden of property and infrastructure damage, recover faster, and take a more proactive stance towards disaster preparedness.

Thank you for consideration of this appeal. Please contact Russell J. Strickland at russell.strickland@maryland.gov or 410-517-3601 for additional information.

Sincerely,



Wes Moore
Governor

Attachments:

Maryland PDA Summary
Cost Changes Spreadsheet
Garrett County Letter of Support
Allegany County Letter of Support
Barton Letter of Support
Frostburg Letter of Support

Midland Letter of Support
Westernport Letter of Support