



HENRY DARGAN McMASTER
GOVERNOR

September 16, 2024

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

Through: Regional Administrator Robert Samaan (Region IV)
Federal Emergency Management Agency
3005 Chamblee Tucker Road
Atlanta, GA 30341

Dear Mr. President:

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”), and implemented by 44 C.F.R. § 206.36, I respectfully request that you declare a major disaster for the State of South Carolina as a result of Tropical Storm Debby, which made landfall near Bulls Bay in Charleston County, South Carolina, on August 8, 2024, and resulted in three weeks of flash and riverine flooding impacting multiple areas of the State.

As much as 22 inches of rain was recorded between August 5 and August 9, with an area near Moncks Corner in Berkeley County receiving the most rain at 22.02 inches. Five days of rain caused significant flash flooding in coastal counties, followed by severe riverine flooding in the Edisto, Pee Dee, Little Pee Dee, and Waccamaw River basins. As detailed below, the extensive damage and other impacts associated with Tropical Storm Debby exceed local and state capacity to support community recovery. Based on damage assessments validated in Joint Preliminary Damage Assessments (“JPDA’s”) conducted by FEMA, state, and county teams, I am requesting all categories of Public Assistance (“PA”) for 12 counties and Individual Assistance (“IA”) for three counties as detailed below:

For IA: Charleston, Colleton, and Dorchester Counties
For all categories of PA: Bamberg, Barnwell, Berkeley, Colleton, Dillon,
Dorchester, Georgetown, Hampton, Horry, Jasper,
Orangeburg, and Union Counties

In addition to the foregoing, I am also seeking Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (“HMGP”) assistance statewide. I am requesting that you designate an incident period of August 4, 2024, through August 22, 2024.

After making its initial landfall in Florida as a hurricane, Debby moved back into the Atlantic Ocean before approaching the South Carolina coast on August 6, 2024, bringing historic amounts of rainfall first in southeastern coastal areas and later pushing rainbands inland. By the afternoon of August 6, Debby had produced at least eight reported tornadoes, several of which caused structural damage. Debby ultimately made landfall near Bulls Bay as a tropical storm in the early morning hours of August 8. Tropical Storm Debby brought rainfall totals and river crests higher and more severe than those associated with several hurricanes that impacted South Carolina in recent years.

In anticipation of and in response to this situation, I consulted with officials in the impacted counties and took appropriate action under state law. On August 4, I declared a State of Emergency for the State of South Carolina and directed the execution of the State Emergency Operations Plan in accordance with Section 401(a) of the Stafford Act. I requested a federal emergency declaration, which was granted on August 5, 2024 (FEMA-EM-3606-SC). The emergency declaration included PA Category B limited to Direct Federal Assistance and costs associated with evacuation, mass care, and sheltering. State and local government agencies coordinated preparations for several days before Tropical Storm Debby’s landfall in South Carolina, including staging personnel and resources and communicating with the public about protective actions.

I. Overview of Impacts and Costs

Counties throughout South Carolina experienced damage or costs, and residents reported some level of damage to more than 900 homes. Public agency costs and infrastructure damage are projected at more than \$16 million. Based on the JPDAs, 12 counties have met their respective county thresholds for PA program eligibility. The State’s PA-eligible costs of \$10,969,057 validated to date exceed the FY2024 South Carolina state threshold for PA of \$9,417,902.

Residential and infrastructure damage from Tropical Storm Debby extended well inland. Fourteen counties reported residential damage. Local and state government agencies in almost all the State’s counties (45 of 46) reported preparedness and response costs, debris-removal activities, or infrastructure damage. As a result of the storm’s heavy rainfall, several dams were at risk of failure or overtopped because of high water flow. Although electric power outages were minimal and short-lived, water utilities and water supplies were damaged or contaminated in multiple locations, including water outages that affected two hospitals for multiple days. Damage was reported to 72 business across 14 counties, and agricultural losses are still being calculated.

II. Response

Monitoring for Hurricane Debby began before the storm entered the Gulf of Mexico, and an initial coordination call was held with counties and state agencies on Sunday, August 4. The State Emergency Operations Center (“SEOC”) moved to operational condition (“OPCON”) 2

(partial activation). Beginning Monday, August 5, the State Emergency Response Team (“SERT”) and Executive Group conducted daily calls. Multiple county emergency operations centers (“EOCs”) moved to OPCON 1, which is the highest operational level in South Carolina. The SEOC transitioned to OPCON 1 on August 6, and SEOC full or partial activation in support of response continued through August 20. State agencies, including the S.C. Department of Transportation, S.C. Department of Public Safety, and the S.C. Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation, as well as electric cooperatives, incurred costs both in preparing for Tropical Storm Debby and in responding to repair critical infrastructure and restore essential services in the storm’s aftermath. Multiple county agencies and EOCs remained in response mode for almost three weeks.

The SERT and county and local government agencies took action to prepare and stage personnel and resources to implement and support protective actions, maintain or quickly resume critical services, and respond to resident and community needs. This initiative included more than 420 state law enforcement personnel at peak to support traffic control points and traffic incident response. Agencies and organizations readied backup communications capabilities, staged and deployed utility restoration and search and rescue personnel and equipment, assessed high-risk dams, and supported shelter operations. Counties initiated or offered supplies for sandbag operations to mitigate flood damage. I worked with public-information professionals and the SERT to provide ongoing public messaging regarding risks and protective measures through press conferences and traditional and social media. The State’s public health Care Line operated on a 24/7 basis immediately before, during, and after the storm. The Department of Public Health communicated with medical facilities, and counties checked with residential facilities to coordinate on status and evacuation needs. Counties opened a total of 22 shelters; maximum occupancy was 142 on August 8. Because the path of the storm and its heavy rainfall tracked from south to north, monitoring of river crests and flood potential continued and followed the storm’s path northward.

The following additional information is provided to illustrate the nature and extent of the impacts associated with this disaster in several counties:

Berkeley County suffered the State’s highest rainfall total from Tropical Storm Debby, with more than 22 inches falling in Moncks Corner. Heavy rain that started on Thursday evening, August 8, and extended into Friday morning, August 9, resulted in almost 100 road closures in the county and eliminated ingress or egress to a large neighborhood. Three water system outages were reported, which required the issuance of boil water advisories. Response teams conducted more than 30 rescue missions. Because the widespread flooding rendered many areas inaccessible, initial damage assessment was conducted via flyover.

Charleston County experienced the highest wind gust from the storm in South Carolina at 63 mph in Folly Beach. The county saw 18.47 inches of rainfall (Mt. Pleasant) and severe localized flooding. Approximately 100 residences in the Adams Run, Parkers Ferry, and Wiltown areas of rural Charleston County were impacted by high water levels that compromised septic systems, which caused contamination of private wells that residents rely on for drinking water. The neighborhoods that lacked clean water and functioning septic systems are areas of moderate

to high social vulnerability, and residents are faced with high costs—estimated at \$30,000 each—to repair or replace pump systems. The FEMA JPDA narrative describes the team’s inability to view individual residences during the JPDA process.

Colleton County saw 17.57 inches of rain and widespread riverine flooding along the Edisto River, which rose to a level not seen since 1945. Heavy rain and related flooding caused impacts worse than the 2015 flood (FEMA-DR-4241-SC). The Edisto River crested at 17.2 feet compared to just 16.06 feet in the 2015 flood. Response organizations conducted more than 30 water rescues, including several nighttime rescues, which is more than has been conducted in a single incident the county in the past several decades. Conditions presented challenges even for high water vehicles, with three getting stuck during rescue operations. Response operations continued for several weeks because flood conditions lasted in some areas through Friday, August 23. Multiple tornadoes were confirmed, including two EF-1 tornadoes that damaged residences on Edisto Beach on August 5. Flood-impacted areas in northeastern Colleton County are areas of high social vulnerability, which supports the need for additional resources to support community recovery.

Dorchester County faced flash flooding from heavy rainfall, followed by severe riverine flooding—both along the Edisto River, which crested at its highest level since 1945, and along the Ashley River—all of which caused damage to homes, businesses, and infrastructure. The Town of Summerville recorded the most rainfall in the county, at 18.38 inches. Flooding bifurcated the county for more than 24 hours, and approximately 100 roads were closed by floodwaters, which hindered response and damage assessment activities. Response organizations performed 50 water rescues, 48 of which were conducted by local resources and two of which were conducted by a mutual aid swift water rescue team. The coroner supported a local church in managing two caskets disinterred from a church cemetery. Dorchester and Colleton Counties used Area Command to manage rescues along the Edisto River with Incident Management Team (“IMT”) support provided through in-state mutual aid. Impacted areas in the western end of Dorchester County include high social vulnerability populations.

Horry County experienced extended riverine flooding in the Waccamaw and Pee Dee River basins and along the Intracoastal Waterway. Levels on these waterways stayed above flood stage through August 23. At the peak of impacts, 68 roads were closed in the county. The county built a protective berm to avoid or minimize residential flooding in Bucksport, a community that has experienced flooding in past hurricane events. The county opened two shelters during the event to accommodate residents from flooded areas and established access control points to prevent drivers from using flooded roadways. The cities of Loris and North Myrtle Beach received more than 17 inches of rain, causing roads to close because of flooding. The Town of Surfside Beach, City of Conway, Conway Medical Center, and local utilities also suffered significant impacts.

Orangeburg County received 11.84 inches of rain in Holly Hill, which resulted in flooded neighborhoods. Additional impacts included damage to private residences and to public roadways and recreational facilities.

II. Public Assistance Information

As noted above, all South Carolina counties reported costs associated with Tropical Storm Debby, with the most severe damage and highest costs in coastal counties and counties just inland from the coast. With high water levels and the extended nature of flooding, damage to road and water infrastructure constitutes a large portion of costs. The categories of damage experienced and validated are detailed below:

Category A, Debris	\$286,327	2.61%
Category B, Emergency Protective Measures	\$6,522,559	59.46%
Category C, Roads and Bridges	\$2,539,206	23.15%
Category D, Water Systems	\$240,000	2.19%
Category E, Buildings and Equipment	\$20,600	0.19%
Category F, Utilities	\$899,915	8.20%
Category G, Other	\$460,450	4.20%

Additional details are provided in the enclosed PA PDA Summary.

IV. Individual Assistance Information

Tropical Storm Debby's heavy rain and flooding caused major damage to residences and to water infrastructure that serves residential areas. Many of the impacted areas are rural or remote and became more isolated by floodwaters that took days to recede. In the three counties for which an IA declaration is requested, 84 residences with major damage were confirmed in the JPDA process. Three were confirmed as destroyed. Tornado damage in several coastal communities included damage to at least one primary home as well as other vacation homes. Although not included in damage assessment data for IA, this type of additional residential damage constitutes an impact to local economic resources and to community recovery. Approximately 100 Charleston County residences were classified as having minor damage based on federal damage assessment criteria although contamination of their private wells means residents have lost access to clean drinking water. A local elected official delivered bottled water to the area. In addition to the three counties requested for IA in this request, the State has separately requested a Small Business Administration-only declaration for Berkeley and Orangeburg Counties. Those two counties had substantial residential damage from Tropical Storm Debby's heavy rain and flooding, but damage levels were not deemed to meet criteria for IA.

Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster ("VOADs") supported shelter operations and are assisting residents with tropical storm-related impacts to residences, including debris removal, tarping of roofs, and repairs. The S.C. Emergency Management Division and the S.C. Office of Resilience continue to coordinate with VOADs and counties to assist residents with unmet needs.

According to the 2020 U.S. Census, South Carolina’s population was 5,118,425. Although the 3.9% unemployment rate in South Carolina for July 2024 (U.S. Department of Labor) was slightly lower than the national average of 4.3%, the State ranks behind many other States in other relevant economic measures, including per-capita income. Statewide per-capita income is \$36,072 compared to the nationwide average of \$41,261 (U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2022 5-year estimates). The State’s Total Taxable Resources, based on U.S. Department of the Treasury information, is \$327.4 billion (U.S. Dept. of the Treasury, 2023).

Percentage of population	<i>Below poverty level (for whom poverty status is determined)</i>	<i>Households receiving government assistance (“SNAP”)</i>	<i>Pre-disaster unemployment rate</i>	<i>65 years and older</i>	<i>18 years and younger</i>	<i>With a disability</i>	<i>5 years and older who speak a language other than English</i>
Data Source	ACS 2022 (S1701)	ACS 2022 (S2201)	ACS 2022 (DP03)	ACS 2022 (S0101)	ACS 2022 (S0101)	ACS 2022 (S1810)	ACS 2022 (S1601)
National Average	12.5%	11.5%	5.3%	16.5%	21.4%	12.9%	22.0%
State Average	14.4%	10.5%	5.2%	18.2%	21.5%	14.3%	7.5%
Jurisdictions requested for IA designation:							
Charleston County	12.3%	6.5%	3.7%	17.3%	19.4%	10.7%	7.6%
Colleton County	16.6%	20.8%	8.6%	19.9%	22.4%	16.8%	3.9%
Dorchester County	12.3%	8.1%	5.5%	14.7%	24.1%	13.5%	7.1%

Individual and household recovery from disaster are also impacted by demographic and socioeconomic factors. South Carolina uses social vulnerability indices to incorporate consideration of social vulnerability into mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery activities and programs. For the counties for which IA is requested, social vulnerability index (“SVI”) ratings (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”) National Overall SVI, 2022) are reflected below:

County	CDC SVI
Charleston County	0.4343 (low-medium)
Colleton County	0.966 (high)
Dorchester County	0.6306 (medium-high)

In general, the higher the number, the greater the area's social vulnerability to the impacts of hazards. By census tract, several impacted areas in these counties have higher SVI scores than the county average. For example, census tract 45019002402, which includes three Charleston County neighborhoods that lost access to clean water because of well contamination, has a medium-high SVI rating. Based on the extent of the damage and the economic recovery needs of affected households and communities, I am seeking the inclusion of all IA program components in the requested disaster declaration.

V. Recent Disaster Impacts

The State of South Carolina has experienced 10 federally declared disasters since 2014, one incident declared as an emergency only, and a fire-management declaration, as well as multiple smaller events, which were addressed using local and state resources. These events have collectively impacted the capacity or capability of state and local governments to respond to and recover from the damage caused by Tropical Storm Debby. Counties most heavily impacted by Tropical Storm Debby also previously experienced extensive damage and incurred corresponding costs from one or more recent hurricanes or tropical storms, including Matthew (2016), Irma (2017), Florence (2018), Dorian (2019), Ian (2022), and Idalia (2023) (emergency declaration). VOADs continue to assist residents with damages and other unmet needs associated with past years' storms, and repeated emergencies and disasters are stretching capacity and resources.

On behalf of the people of the great State of South Carolina, thank you in advance for your consideration of this request and assistance with this matter.

Yours very truly,



Henry Dargan McMaster

Enclosures: FEMA Form 010-0-13
A: TS Debby SC IHP Workbook Cost Estimates Summary
B: TS Debby SC PA JPDA Summary
TS Debby South Carolina Rainfall and Tornadoes (National Weather Service)