



HENRY DARGAN McMASTER  
GOVERNOR

January 22, 2026

The Honorable Donald J. Trump  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Through: Acting Regional Administrator Robert Ashe  
Federal Emergency Management Agency Region IV  
3005 Chamblee Tucker Road  
Atlanta, GA 30341

Dear Mr. President:

Pursuant to provisions of Section 501 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 5191–5193 (Stafford Act), and as implemented by 44 CFR § 206.35, I respectfully request that you issue an emergency declaration for 46 counties and the Catawba Indian Nation in South Carolina based on projected impacts and costs from the severe winter weather forecasted to impact the State on January 24–26. These costs include preparations in advance of the storm’s arrival for sheltering, infrastructure protection, debris clearance, and other operations to protect lives and property. The State will exhaust available resources to respond to this dangerous winter storm. The National Weather Service (NWS) forecasts severe winter weather for the State followed by several days of extreme cold temperatures. Ice accumulations are expected to be sufficient to severely impact electricity transmission and transportation in a third of the State. Widespread power outages during a period of extreme low temperatures will create health and safety risks to residents. The attached NWS briefing and graphics provide additional information about predicted conditions.

The most damaging feature of this storm is expected to be ice accumulation from freezing rain. NWS “most likely” forecasts are more than a quarter inch of freezing rain in a third of the State. Forecast scenarios have included high-end amounts of more than an inch in the State’s northern counties. Ice accumulation of more than a quarter inch can cause downed trees and limbs and power outages. The weekend’s precipitation will be followed by extreme cold temperatures:

teens in much of the State and single digits in the State’s northern counties. Residents without power will be at risk for adverse health impacts from exposure to these cold temperatures without the benefit of electric heat. And residents who are dependent on electric-power medical devices will be doubly impacted.

In response, I have consulted with South Carolina counties and have taken appropriate action under state law, including directing execution of the State Emergency Operations Plan in accordance with Section 501(a) of the Stafford Act. On January 21, I declared a State of Emergency to exist throughout the State of South Carolina. That same day, the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) moved to Operation Condition 2 to support monitoring and preparations for this impending weather event.

Ice Accumulation Impacts	
Amount	Effect
.25" or less	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Windshields coated</li> <li>• Bridges are slick</li> <li>• Light ice on trees</li> </ul>
.25" to .5"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tree limbs sag or break</li> <li>• Most roads are icy</li> <li>• Power outages</li> </ul>
.5" or greater	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Widespread tree/power line damage</li> <li>• Roads dangerous or impassable</li> </ul>

The State and counties are actively preparing for this storm. Sixty-two resource requests to the SEOC (from 18 counties as of Thursday afternoon) include backup communications support, generators, shelter operations support, oxygen concentrators for medical support, and specialized response teams (e.g., search and rescue). At least seven counties are preparing to open and staff emergency shelters. The S.C. Department of Public Health is coordinating with counties to operate emergency medical equipment shelters in the event of extended power outages. Additionally, counties are preparing for dangerous travel conditions to begin Saturday, and state law enforcement and National Guard assets will be on standby to support traffic control and clearing of roads to maintain emergency and infrastructure/key services access. State law enforcement agencies will deploy additional staff beginning Saturday, January 24, to conduct preparations and stage to respond to calls for service. The S.C. Emergency Management Division has initiated its disaster logistics support contract. I have also ordered the S.C. State Guard to be on standby to assist in these efforts.

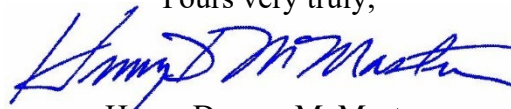
Although the extent of federal resource needs is currently unknown, it is projected that Direct Federal Assistance may be needed to support key response and recovery activities. Depending on shelter occupancy, displacement, and residential damage numbers, the State will work to identify congregate and noncongregate options to shelter displaced residents as needed and support post-event shelter transition. An initial South Carolina Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (SCVOAD) coordination call for this incident is planned for today, and counties are communicating with VOADs and state Emergency Support Function 6 (Mass Care) regarding shelter support needs. Given that response needs are now expected to be beyond the State’s capabilities and resources, we request federal assistance under an emergency declaration with an incident period beginning Wednesday, January 21, 2026, and continuing.

Potential impacts from this winter weather system—particularly ice accumulation coupled with extreme cold temperatures—pose a threat to the safety, security, and welfare of South

Carolínians. Counties expected to be most impacted by the winter storm were hard hit by Hurricane Helene in October 2024, and two saw severe wildfires in March 2025. Based on expected severe impacts and the potential for changes from the current forecast, I consider the entire State at risk. I therefore request that you authorize Public Assistance Category B (Emergency Protective Measures) reimbursement as well as noncongregate shelter authorization and Direct Federal Assistance for all 46 counties and the Catawba Indian Nation to support response and recovery efforts. South Carolina will exhaust state resources before requesting specific assistance.

On behalf of the grateful people of South Carolina, thank you for your continued leadership and your consideration of this matter.

Yours very truly,



Henry Dargan McMaster

Enclosures: FEMA Form 010-0-13  
NWS Expected Ice Accumulation  
NWS South Carolina Low Temperature Monday Night Forecast  
NWS Columbia, SC, Briefing, 10 a.m., January 22, 2026