

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 31, 2026

President Donald Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Robert Fenton, Senior Official Performing
the Duties of FEMA Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

Dear President Trump and Acting Administrator Fenton,

We write to you on behalf of residents of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to urge you to declare a major disaster in our state. On July 2, 2026, Massachusetts Governor Maura Healey was notified that you denied the Commonwealth's initial request for a major disaster declaration for the February 2026 blizzard in the Northeast. On July 31, the Governor appealed that decision. We now ask that you approve her appeal under the rules of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act.

Communities in Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and Rhode Island suffered costly damage to infrastructure and undertook expensive snow removal efforts as a result of the February 2026 blizzard. Across the region, the storm is estimated to have caused as much as \$38 billion in damage and economic losses.¹ In Massachusetts, communities such as Fall River and New Bedford experienced historic levels of snowfall, with more than 41 inches of snow reported in some areas.² Heavy snow damaged public infrastructure and power lines, required the deployment of the Massachusetts National Guard for snow response, and prompted the establishment of several emergency shelters. The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency, in consultation with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), reported more than \$45 million in blizzard-related expenses, exceeding Massachusetts' threshold of \$13.6 million in damage that is required for federal reimbursement eligibility.

In its denial of Massachusetts' disaster declaration, FEMA stated that it is no longer counting snow removal expenses toward state eligibility, in contravention of federal requirements. The Stafford Act requires FEMA to maintain snowstorm eligibility for major disaster status. The Act's definition of a "major disaster" explicitly lists "snowstorm" among the natural catastrophes eligible for such a designation.³ In addition, FEMA has consistently

¹ *Blizzard Caused up to \$38 Billion in Estimated Damage, Economic Loss*, Insurance Journal (February 24, 2026), <https://www.insurancejournal.com/news/east/2026/02/24/859449.htm>.

² Louisa Moller, *Fall River, Massachusetts officials urge patience as city digs out from 41 inches of snow after blizzard*, CBS Boston (February 24, 2026), <https://www.cbsnews.com/boston/news/fall-river-massachusetts-blizzard-cleanup-plow-drivers/>.

³ 42 U.S.C. §5122(2).

recognized this eligibility, including earlier this year when it approved a major disaster declaration in Mississippi following a winter storm.⁴ If FEMA or the Administration is attempting to undertake a policy that removes snow removal eligibility from the major disaster determination process, such a policy would be misguided and also directly violate the plain language of federal law.

Other reporting points suggests that an additional factor may have played a role in the Administration's denial of the Commonwealth's request: the politicization of nonpartisan, congressionally-appropriated disaster funding. Earlier this year, Politico reported that the Trump administration has approved only 23 percent of disaster requests from blue states compared to 89 percent of requests from red states, and that blue states wait twice as long as red states to receive a decision from the Administration on disaster requests.⁵

If FEMA's initial denial was based on an attempt to reinterpret or narrow the definition of a major disaster, we urge FEMA to comply with the Stafford Act and reverse course. However, if the denial was influenced by partisan political considerations, we must insist on a full reconsideration of this decision to restore parity in the federal disaster response process.

Accordingly, and given the profound impacts Massachusetts experienced and the clear eligibility for assistance under the Stafford Act, we also request that you approve Governor Healey's appeal of the Commonwealth's major disaster declaration following the February 2026 blizzard. Granting this appeal would provide much-needed relief to affected communities across Massachusetts and ensure that FEMA's actions remain consistent with the Stafford Act's protocols for major disaster eligibility.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,


Edward J. Markey
United States Senator


Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator


Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress


William R. Keating
Member of Congress

⁴ *Mississippi Severe Winter Storm DR-4899-MS*, FEMA.gov, <https://www.fema.gov/disaster/4899>.

⁵ Thomas Frank, *It's 3 times harder for blue states to get disaster funding under Trump*, Politico (Mar. 23, 2026), <https://www.politico.com/news/2026/03/23/trump-denies-disaster-aid-for-democratic-led-states-00831199>.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Ayanna S. Pressley", written over a horizontal line.

Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Jake Auchincloss", written over a horizontal line.

Jake Auchincloss
Member of Congress