

# United States Senate

July 2, 2026

The Honorable Brooke Rollins  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable Kelly Loeffler  
Administrator  
U.S. Small Business Administration  
409 3rd St., SW  
Washington, DC 20416

The Honorable Lee Zeldin  
Administrator  
Environmental Protection Agency  
1200 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Robert J. Fenton  
Senior Official  
Federal Emergency Management Agency  
500 C St SW  
Washington, DC 20024

## **RE: Wastewater Event in the Merrimack River and on the North Shore**

Dear Secretary Rollins, Administrator Loeffler, Administrator Zeldin, and Acting Administrator Fenton,

We write to alert you to an ongoing situation in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, with the goal of ensuring swift review by your agencies should the Commonwealth pursue emergency federal support.

On June 26, 2026, a significant rainstorm in the Merrimack Valley of Massachusetts caused two sewer pipe breaks in the city of Haverhill, sending an estimated 8 million gallons of untreated wastewater a day into the Merrimack River.<sup>1</sup> On July 1, the break was repaired, stopping new flows of wastewater. However, a significant amount of pollution remains in the system.<sup>2</sup> From Haverhill, the river flows through several cities and towns before emptying into the Atlantic Ocean in the city of Newburyport on Massachusetts' North Shore.

As a result of this breakage and concerns about the amount of wastewater that has discharged into the river and reached the coast, shellfish growing areas are temporarily closed in the communities of Gloucester, Newburyport, Essex, Ipswich, Newbury, Rockport, Rowley, and Salisbury; and swimming has been temporarily suspended at several beaches in Newburyport, Salisbury, Essex, and Ipswich. If the beaches do not fully and reliably reopen soon, businesses in these communities could see a downturn in traffic. The City of Haverhill is also assessing the short- and long-term costs associated with the emergency response and repairing and replacing the damaged infrastructure.

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<sup>1</sup> Genzer, Samantha. "Healey Vows Urgent Response as Haverhill Sewage Spill Fouls Merrimack River." *Boston.com*, June 30, 2026. <https://www.boston.com/news/local-news/2026/06/30/healey-vows-urgent-response-as-haverhill-sewage-spill-fouls-merrimack-river/>.

<sup>2</sup> Thornton, Claire. "Sewer Overflows into Merrimack River Have Ended, Officials Say. But It's Still Not Safe to Swim at These Beaches." *The Boston Globe*, July 1, 2026. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2026/07/01/science/massachusetts-beach-closures-july-1/>

Massachusetts is currently experiencing a heat wave with heat index values reaching 112 degrees Fahrenheit, which could set records and has prompted the National Weather Service to issue an Extreme Heat Warning for the region.<sup>3</sup> Further, the upcoming Fourth of July weekend represents a major economic generator for coastal and riverside communities and small businesses in Massachusetts, as these communities rely on the anticipated revenue from the significant influx of residents and visitors around the holiday. In addition to the immediate risks posed by the sewage flow into the river, closure of water access during the heat wave and over the holiday weekend would create the potential for additional public health and economic concerns. Constituents could lose key places to escape the dangerous heat, and the absence of beachgoers could yield losses for local businesses during one of their highest-revenue weekends of the year.

Further, due to U.S. Food and Drug Administration regulations, shellfisheries must close for at least a week after the contamination into the Merrimack River has ceased. This additional closure time would be detrimental to the shellfish industry, especially given that July is historically one of the busiest times for commercial and recreational clamming on the North Shore.

We are grateful for the response of the Commonwealth and local officials to these ongoing issues, and we thank them for their diligence in protecting the public and economic health of the region. Officials are continuously monitoring the contamination levels in the river and on the North Shore to determine when it is safe for people to fish, work, and recreate in the waters. As part of these efforts, the Commonwealth will determine whether federal assistance is necessary in responding to the environmental or economic impacts stemming from the discharge.

Our offices and the Commonwealth have already been in touch with several of your agencies, and we are grateful for your engagement. Should Massachusetts officials determine that the concerns raised by residents, the shellfishing community, and other businesses along the river and the coast exceed the Commonwealth's ability to respond and require emergency support from the federal government, we respectfully ask that you quickly review any request from Governor Maura Healey and expedite all appropriate federal relief.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. We will continue to monitor the situation closely and support residents, businesses, and visitors across the Merrimack Valley, North Shore, and throughout Massachusetts.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

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<sup>3</sup> Mahan, Ken. "Scorching Start to July as New England Endures Dangerous Heat and Humidity." *The Boston Globe*, July 1, 2026. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2026/06/30/metro/new-england-boston-heat-wave-weather/>.