

## General Assembly Passes \$793 Million Hurricane Florence Recovery Package

By Administrator

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**Raleigh, N.C.**— Governor Roy Cooper signed into law a \$793 million Hurricane Florence relief package bringing the legislature’s total commitment to disaster recovery since the storm to \$850 million. With this latest action, the North Carolina General Assembly has allocated over \$1.2 billion for hurricane recovery since 2016.

Governor Roy Cooper praised the General Assembly's action.

“I appreciate legislators responding quickly and taking this initial step to help North Carolinians recover from this devastating storm, particularly in the areas of education and the federal match. However, we must continue to work together to provide more for affordable housing and farmers as well as to make real investments to ensure clean water and to lessen the impacts of future storms on our homes, roads, businesses and water infrastructure.”

In a joint statement, state House Speaker Tim Moore (R-Cleveland) and Senate Leader Phil Berger (R-Rockingham) said, “Since Hurricane Florence hit, we’ve sought to take politics out of the relief effort. Today’s historic, bipartisan aid package is yet another step in a collaborative recovery process that we hope will continue.”

The Hurricane Florence Disaster Recovery Fund (HFDRF) appropriates \$65 million to provide a state match for federal disaster assistance and another \$65 million state match for federal transportation assistance. It spends \$60 million on capital recovery funds for public school facilities and \$30 million for capital needs in the University of North Carolina system. Another \$28 million will benefit local governments, while agriculture recovery received \$50 million. More than \$30 million was directed to housing recovery support.

Tens of millions more dollars will meet needs in behavioral health, community hospitals, small businesses, community colleges, and mosquito abatement efforts in areas of North Carolina affected by Hurricane Florence. Funding for coastal beach renourishment, dredging needs, marine debris cleanup, and commercial fishermen were also included in the recovery package.

The measure includes a fix for members of the National Guard who participated in the response to Hurricane Matthew. The bill waives outstanding debt service members owed due to

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accidental overpayments by the Department of Public Safety (DPS). It also requires DPS to reimburse service members who already repaid the department.

As part of the continuing collaboration among state leaders to respond to the historic storm, officials from the Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM), including State Budget Director Charles Perusse, briefed key appropriations leaders and fiscal staff in the North Carolina legislature on Thursday. Participants discussed the Governor's proposal at length in a productive working session.

OSBM told lawmakers that, consistent with the descriptions contained in the Governor's report, the needs assessment released this week was a preliminary figure that may change based on further analysis and the availability of additional federal aid. OSBM also said that this is a long-term, five-year plan.

The report indicated that more concrete, on-the-ground data will soon be available to update the preliminary needs assessment, which relied in part on computer modeling. As such, some assessed needs may shift considerably over time as federal aid becomes clearer and damage assessments continue. Education needs, for example, are particularly preliminary, and many of the damage assessments will change in OSBM's final report, lawmakers and staff heard from administration officials.

OSBM is also working on an estimate of how much funding could be spent in the next six months. They indicated that course corrections may be required over time. Based on this information and the Governor's report, the legislature appropriated a majority of the funding immediately while preserving maximum flexibility to meet the final needs assessments that are currently ongoing.

Most of the funding transfer comes from the state's record \$2 billion rainy day fund.