



U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
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Chicago, IL 60605

**FEMA**

February 21, 2020

The Honorable Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senate  
302 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Klobuchar:

This is in response to your letter, cosigned by the Minnesota Congressional Delegation, dated February 12, 2020, to Administrator Pete Gaynor regarding DR-4442, the designation for the declared disaster resulting from the Severe Winter Storm, Straight-line Winds, and Flooding that occurred March 12 to April 28, 2019. As the Administrator of Region V, which has responsibility for administering FEMA's programs in the State of Minnesota, your letter was forwarded to me for response.

In your letter, you echoed Governor Tim Walz's concerns contained in a letter sent to DHS-FEMA on January 23, about the difference between the original estimates for the cost of this disaster as a result of the Joint Preliminary Damage Assessments (Joint PDA) and the current estimated total. Following receipt of the Governor's letter, Region V and staff of DR-4442 conducted a review of the factors that have led to this increase.

On February 12, I and members of my staff personally met with Governor Walz to discuss these issues and share with him the results of this internal review. For DR-4442, the increased estimate is primarily a result of an increase in the number of eligible applicants and an increase in the amount of applicant-provided disaster cost estimates.

Prior to the Joint PDA for DR-4442, the Minnesota Department of Public Safety Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM) identified 648 potential applicants. However, during the course of the Joint PDA, only 554 participants presented eligible damage with verifiable documentation. Following the disaster declaration, an additional 74 potentially-eligible applicants were identified, in addition to applicants gathering necessary documentation. We now have 722 total eligible applicants with verifiable damages.

It is important to remember that the purpose of the Joint PDA is to verify eligible damages identified by state, tribal and local applicants. HSEM's initial reports indicated \$32 million in estimated damages, with that figure increasing to over \$39 million at the conclusion of Joint PDAs. FEMA field staff are currently working with all eligible applicants to gather the necessary documentation to support their requests for assistance.

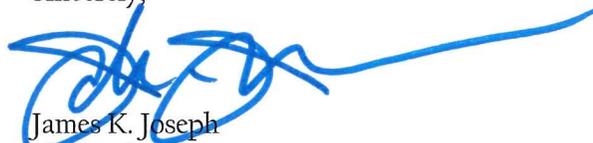
FEMA is committed to our partnership of assisting with the full recovery of all eligible applicants. As you know, under the provisions of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Stafford Act), Public Assistance is a cost-share program with the federal share of assistance set at not less than 75 percent. As damage estimates increase, I hold steadfast in our obligations under the FEMA-State Agreement, which I reiterated to Governor Walz, that we will provide the federal share of eligible

expenses. In addition to these increased funds for recovery, the state will also receive a commensurate increase in Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funding, which is calculated at 15% of total federal expenditures, and which can be used statewide to make Minnesota more resilient.

Finally, during my meeting with Governor Walz, I made several commitments to improve our disaster estimation process and cost awareness by state disaster staff. I committed that during future Joint Preliminary Damage Assessments, FEMA would allow as much additional time as would be needed both for the State to identify potential applicants and for those applicants to gather additional damage information to improve their estimation of potential costs. In addition, while increasing estimates were available to HSEM staff, I committed to a review of the information sharing practices in the current disaster to increase the level of awareness of operational activities by state staff to avoid any potential for surprises or “sticker shock” of both the current and future disasters.

I hope that this information is helpful, and once again reiterate that FEMA will support disaster recovery efforts at no less than 75%, no matter the final cost. I am happy to meet with you personally or arrange for a briefing with my staff to discuss this issue further. As always, please feel free to contact me at any time with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



James K. Joseph  
Regional Administrator