



**North Carolina General Assembly
Senator Phil Berger
Senator Kevin Corbin
Senator Warren Daniel
Senator Ralph Hise
Senator Tim Moffitt**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Senate Passes First Round of Helene Relief Funding

Creates Hurricane Helene fund, allocates \$273 million

Extends the State of Emergency through March 1, 2025

Makes several changes to election administration for western counties

Raleigh, N.C. – Today, the North Carolina Senate passed the initial round of hurricane relief for Western North Carolina. The bill, among other things, creates a Helene Fund that will include \$273 million from the state’s Savings Reserve, also known as the Rainy Day Fund. It also creates the Potential Tropical Cyclone #8 (PTC8) Fund for Brunswick and New Hanover Counties, and includes intent language to fund the PTC8 Fund and the relief needs for the Nash County tornado. The relief package extends the State of Emergency through March 1, 2025.

The first round of relief includes substantial funding and several policies to assist with the immediate impacts from Hurricane Helene. The funding and policies include:

Funding

- \$250 million for the state and local match for federal disaster assistance programs.
- \$16 million to the Department of Public Instruction for school nutrition employee compensation.
- \$2 million to the Office of State Budget and Management for grants to the N.C. Association of Regional Councils of Government, the N.C. League of Municipalities, and the N.C. Association of County Commissioners to provide technical assistance to affected counties.
- \$5 million to the State Board of Elections for election administration changes.

Education

- Grants school calendar flexibility and additional remote instruction days for impacted school districts.
- Allows teachers and school employees to be paid for scheduled instructional days missed due to Hurricane Helene.
- Extends the deadline for bonuses to be paid out to qualifying principals in affected counties.

Agriculture and Environmental Quality

- Allows DEQ to move funds between the Clean Water Reserve and the Drinking Water Reserve within the Water Infrastructure fund to provide emergency loans to local governments.
- Allows local government units within the major disaster declaration area to use already appropriated water infrastructure funds for mitigation or remediation of disaster-related damage, and/or temporary measures to allow the preservation or reservation of drinking water and wastewater services.
- Allows wastewater treatment plants to be required to accept domestic septage even if from beyond the county or municipal boundaries during a state of emergency.
- Allows the Commissioner of Agriculture to waive permitting requirements for certain burning activities because of a disaster/in a disaster area.
- Allows Golden LEAF to extend the terms of loans by 12 additional months to 180 months for businesses impacted by Hurricane Helene.

Transportation

- Allows the governor to waive certain DMV fees in the counties impacted by Hurricane Helene through December 31, 2024.

- Authorizes the governor to waive some environmental permitting requirements for road repairs needed due to storm damage during a state of emergency.
- Authorizes the DOT to utilize certain alternative design delivery methods to contract for the repair and replacement of transportation infrastructure damaged or destroyed as a result of the impact of Hurricane Helene.

Retirement

- Temporarily allows state employee retirees to return to work before the six-month separation is over if they are returning to assist with Hurricane Helene emergency or recovery efforts.

Tax

- Corporate Income, Personal Income and Franchise Tax
 - Waives interest on underpayments of franchise, corporate income, and individual income taxes for taxpayers in the affected counties from September 25, 2024, through May 1, 2025.
- Sales Taxes
 - Waives interest on underpayments of State, local, or transit sales and use taxes for businesses in affected counties.
 - Provides delayed deadlines for quarterly and monthly returns for September and October 2024.
- Withholding Taxes
 - Waives interest on underpayments of withheld taxes for employers in affected counties.
 - Provides delayed deadlines for quarterly and monthly returns for September and October 2024.
- Extension for Taxed Partnership and S Corporation Election:
 - Allows partnerships and S Corporations to make a timely election to be taxed as pass through entities for tax year 2023 on returns due between September 25, 2024, and May 1, 2025, if filed by May 1, 2025

Health and Human Services

- Allows the DHHS to temporarily waive or modify certain standards for licensed child care facilities in areas impacted by Hurricane Helene.
- Provides a temporary authorization for the DHHS to increase or relocate home hemodialysis and in-center dialysis stations in areas impacted by Hurricane Helene.
- Provides a temporary authorization for the DHHS to extend provisional licenses for adult care homes and family care homes located in areas impacted by Hurricane Helene.

The bill also makes several election-related changes:

- Applies emergency rules to the 25 counties in North Carolina most acutely impacted by the hurricane and covered by the initial FEMA emergency declaration.
- Allows for more flexibility to appoint election judges and poll workers, including from outside the county.
- Permits state employees to serve as election judges and poll workers without taking leave from their jobs.
- Allows for modified training programs for election officials to account for the need to bring in new recruits in the affected counties.
- Enables county boards of elections by a bipartisan, majority vote to modify early voting plans, including changing sites as well as days and hours of operation.
- Allows for changes to Election Day polling places, including transferring precincts, combining precincts or relocation polling locations.
- Extends absentee ballot return options, allowing voters registered in the affected counties to return ballots to any county board of elections, early voting site, or the State Board of Elections up until 7:30 p.m. on Election Day.
- Permits in-person absentee ballot requests until 5:00 p.m. on November 4.
- Establishes procedures for spoiling and reissuing absentee ballots and for curing deficiencies to accommodate voters who have been displaced by the hurricane.
- Allows poll observers to serve in the affected counties from any other North Carolina county.
- Requires the State Board of Elections to establish processes for transmitting out-of-county absentee ballots to the appropriate county, including documentation of the chain of custody of absentee ballots that are transferred from one county to another.
- Mandates voter education efforts, including establishing a voter information resource for those impacted by the disaster.

“As tragic as this has been, I’ve been moved by the efforts from everyday citizens to step up and lend their neighbor a helping hand. We face every challenge imaginable, but that hasn’t stopped the people of Western North Carolina from rising to the occasion and putting others before themselves. Now, it’s time for us to return that favor and get this first round of relief passed,” said Sen. Kevin Corbin (R-Macon).

“There are thousands of businesses in this region that have been severely damaged or destroyed. They’re struggling to figure out whether they will ever be able to rebuild and reopen. Local residents and the state economy depend heavily on the businesses in Western North Carolina, especially small businesses. It’s the General Assembly’s duty to provide them help during their darkest hour and we are intent on doing just that,” said Sen. Warren Daniel (R-Burke).

“We have so many communities in Western North Carolina that are completely cut off from the rest of the world. They’re unable to communicate and reach out to their families, friends, and government. We need to bring safety and comfort back to these communities, and this package is a step in that direction,” said Sen. Ralph Hise (R-Mitchell).

“Western North Carolina is far from any sense of a full recovery, and the government response must be better from the top down. We know that, the people impacted know that, and it’s our job to keep our foot on the gas pedal to ensure no community is left behind. With the Helene Fund, we’re going to get critical funding out to the most vulnerable areas.” said Sen. Tim Moffitt (R-Henderson).

“The General Assembly is fully activated in its efforts to provide relief to Western North Carolina. This package is just the first round, and more funding will be on the way as we categorize and evaluate the extent of the damage. In the coming months, we will do everything we can to rebuild the region and provide relief to those who so desperately need it,” said Sen. Phil Berger (R-Rockingham).

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