

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 9, 2026

The Honorable Markwayne Mullin
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr Ave SE
Washington, D.C. 20528

The Honorable Cameron Hamilton
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street SW
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Secretary Mullin and Administrator Hamilton:

We write to request that you immediately preserve and provide all Department of Homeland Security documentation related to Rhode Island's request for a major disaster declaration under the Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act for its February 2026 blizzard.

Between February 22-23, 2026, Rhode Island was struck by a record-breaking blizzard that produced up to 37.9 inches of snow – its highest one-day snowfall on record – and up to 74-mile-per-hour winds. The storm hit the state with the intensity of a Category 2 hurricane, caused severe power outages, and tragically resulted in two fatalities and hundreds of emergency room visits. The State of Rhode Island worked with expert officials from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to develop a joint Preliminary Damage Assessment, which was submitted on April 7, 2026 with the state's request and found over \$19 million in validated damages – more than nine times the threshold required for disaster assistance.

To date, FEMA has not provided Rhode Island officials with a written, detailed explanation for why the state's request was denied despite exceeding FEMA's thresholds for assistance. However, on September 3, 2026, Administrator Hamilton, referencing the Administration's denials for assistance to Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts, posted on X: "Winter weather is not new to the Northeast. Federal disaster aid is not a backstop for routine state & local budgeting."

The facts could not be clearer. This storm was not typical winter weather; indeed, the National Weather Service confirmed snowfall totals that exceeded the historical 1-day snowfall records in all five Rhode Island counties. Downplaying this devastating blizzard as just "winter weather" is an insult to those whose lives and businesses were upended by the historic blizzard.

Given the lack of a detailed, written explanation and Administrator Hamilton's flippant claim that the blizzard's impact was a failure of state and local budgeting, we request that you immediately preserve and provide all communications and records, including those with other agencies, the President, and others at the White House, relating to FEMA's evaluation of Rhode Island's disaster request. If you fail to preserve and provide this information, it is only reasonable to assume that claim is entirely without merit.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this important matter.

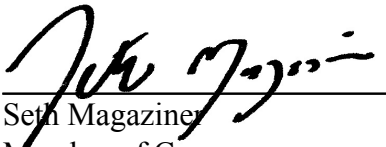
Sincerely,



Jack Reed
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Seth Magaziner
Member of Congress



Gabe Amo
Member of Congress