



March 20, 2023

The Honorable Gavin Newsom  
Governor of California  
1021 O Street, Suite 9000  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: Major Presidential Disaster Declaration & Relief for Monterey & Santa Cruz Counties**

Dear Governor Newsom:

We understand your administration is preparing a request for an expedited major Presidential Disaster Declaration. We wholeheartedly support these efforts and, at the earliest possible opportunity, urge you to request the major Presidential Disaster Declaration for the most recent series of storms to begin on February 24, 2023 or earlier, as substantial local damages occurred well before the proclamation of a state of emergency. We also outline a series of actions below that would complement and enhance such a declaration.

We are thankful for your administration's ongoing support to residents and communities impacted by the emergency conditions resulting from severe winter storms and flooding in Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties. We also appreciate the proclamation of a state of emergency on March 8, 2023 and the President's approval of an emergency declaration on March 10, 2023, which authorized the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to coordinate relief efforts in the impacted areas.

As your administration continues to respond to the impacts of the winter storms and prepares a request for a major Presidential Disaster Declaration, we urge you to act swiftly to address the many unmet, immediate needs of displaced residents, including Pajaro Valley farmworkers. A recent visit to the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds in Watsonville underscored the need of providing direct, economic assistance (of at least \$1,500) to these families, many of whom currently lack homes, jobs, or transportation, among other necessities. In addition, the March 17, 2023 letter from the Latino Legislative Caucus highlighted the need for the state to provide relief to undocumented residents and farmworkers ineligible to receive federal relief funds.

We are well aware of current budgetary constraints and limitations on existing federal and state disaster assistance programs in providing direct assistance to individuals. However, we believe your administration has sufficient authority under the Emergency Services Act to modify existing programs and swiftly provide much-needed assistance to Pajaro Valley farmworkers and residents. For example, your administration could expand the eligible costs and purposes of the California Disaster Assistance Act program and provide greater flexibility and reimbursement to nonprofit organizations providing direct financial assistance to displaced residents.

Another immediate need for both business owners and residents is expediting the pace of reentering and repopulating areas that suffered significant flood damage due to the recent atmospheric rivers. CAL FIRE's damage inspection specialists are currently conducting surveys of impacted areas. Environmental health and building inspectors are also in the process of checking the structural integrity of buildings and determining the safety of the water supply. Unfortunately, the sewer system in Pajaro suffered damage and is in urgent need of repair. Any delays in restoring this infrastructure will impede efforts to clear neighborhoods for reentry and repopulation.

We also urge the Administration, through the Department of Social Services, to continue to support sheltering needs at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds. During a recent tour, a number of community-based organizations noted the lack of adequately trained and culturally competent disaster service workers and volunteers. Evacuees need better translation services; repopulation education; cleaning and repair support upon reentry; assistance in processing FEMA and insurance claims for homes, vehicles and other belongings; and education and counsel for rental issues.

Additionally, local emergency managers are in the process of requesting a long-term housing recovery task force from the state and will need assistance in driving the overall economic recovery of the region, given the extensive and anticipated damages to farmland, crops, and the agricultural workforce. We encourage your administration to support these requests and help county officials who are assessing the losses to the agricultural industry.

Finally, there are four additional investments the state should make to help our communities recover. The first is the need to fully fund the state's share of the Pajaro River Flood Risk Project and expedite the remaining permitting requirements to ensure that residents are protected from future flooding. The second is for the state to provide its full share of funding for upgrades at the Nacimiento and San Antonio Dams & Reservoirs in Monterey County, which will improve flood control capabilities – among other benefits – and protect residents and farmworkers throughout the Salinas Valley. The third is additional funding to continue to establish Farmworker Resources Centers to connect agricultural workers with basic needs assistance and emergency relief services. The fourth is adequate funding for the State Department of Social Services to build a Family Resource Center in the region to increase family stability and prevent vulnerable children from entering the child welfare system in the wake of these and future disasters.

As always, we appreciate your assistance in supporting our local communities and stand ready to aid you in all efforts. Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to any of us directly. Staff can reach Steve O'Mara, Chief of Staff for Assembly Speaker-Designate Rivas, at [Steve.OMara@asm.ca.gov](mailto:Steve.OMara@asm.ca.gov) or (916) 319-2029. In the meantime, we would

welcome the opportunity to meet with the Administration regarding our ongoing efforts in this realm.

Thank you for your leadership.

Sincerely,



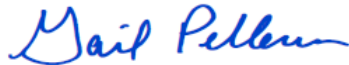
**ROBERT RIVAS**  
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District 75



**JOHN LAIRD**  
Senator  
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