

# MONTEREY COUNTY



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March 20, 2023

The Honorable Gavin Newsom  
Governor, State of California  
1020 O Street, Suite 9000  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: Request for State Emergency Task Force to Assist Pajaro Residents Displaced by Flooding**

Dear Governor Newsom:

On behalf of the Board of Supervisors of the County of Monterey, I write to request the State's immediate assistance to stand-up an Emergency Housing Task Force to plan for, identify, and implement interim and long-term housing solutions to support the community of Pajaro, regardless of the residents' documentation status. Due to the extensive damages caused by the Pajaro River levee break and resultant flooding, the magnitude of the impact on the community, and the extensive resources that will be required to recover, local resources are insufficient to provide for the critical and complex housing needs of the community.

An atmospheric river event carried rain across Monterey County beginning on March 9, 2023, which caused a break in the Pajaro River levee, flooding the town of Pajaro along with wide swaths of agricultural land. Over 2,500 residents have been displaced and close to 500 people are currently in shelters. Two (2) mobile home parks, 800 homes, and one (1) school were impacted by flood water, with a current estimate of around 300 homes and business that sustained major and minor damages. The town is likely to remain uninhabitable for a significant amount of time while the floodwaters drain, stagnant water is pumped, debris removal operations are conducted, and repairs are conducted. Due to the complexities of the sewer and water issues, restoration of these services to the community will take a significant amount of time, which will further slow re-entry. An interim housing solution is needed while critical community services are restored.

The community of Pajaro is a low income, severely disadvantaged minority community that is traditionally underserved with a majority of the population Spanish speaking and a significant portion speaking Mixteco. The community housing demographic consists of predominantly renters (75%) with a large housing cost burden and a higher-than-average persons per household (5.2). Many in this community have nowhere else to go, lack transportation resources, have limited access to new income and trade retraining, and have limited resources to find housing. There is a significant population of undocumented persons who are ineligible for federal disaster aid programs. Based on the community demographics, the housing needs throughout the recovery process are likely to be great.

Much of the community is employed by the agricultural industry, whose inability to work following the flooding will impact their incomes, as the most recent atmospheric rain event has continued to add to the

impacts from flooding experienced by Monterey County growers this winter. The severe winter storms in January resulted in an estimated \$324 million in direct and projected future commodity losses with an additional nearly \$10 million in infrastructure damage for growers in the Salinas Valley. The storm event experienced this March has severely impacted growers in the Pajaro Valley production area and have added to the impacts suffered by growers in the Salinas Valley. This includes expanded flooding of agricultural lands along the Salinas River combined with an estimated 3,000 acres that have been impacted by flooding in the Pajaro Valley agricultural area. Agricultural damages from this storm are estimated to again exceed \$300 million. Many of the working agricultural fields in the Pajaro Valley will have to be kept fallow for up to three years due to the environmental contamination caused by floodwater.

A significant portion of the community will likely struggle to find work following the disaster in the midst of the difficult task of recovering and rebuilding their homes and community. It is urgent to identify a variety of housing solutions to avoid exacerbating the homelessness emergency in the state. This community was also impacted by the January flood events leading to a cycle of evacuations and damages, which has placed a disproportionate burden on one of the most vulnerable communities in the County. The saturated watershed and vulnerable levee has increased the threat level in this community for the foreseeable future while levee repairs are conducted. Future storms this winter will have the potential to cause additional damage in the community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Luis A. Alejo".

Luis A. Alejo, Chair  
Board of Supervisors

Cc: Nancy Ward, Director CalOES [nancy.ward@caloes.ca.gov](mailto:nancy.ward@caloes.ca.gov)  
Hon. Anna Caballero, 14<sup>th</sup> Senate District  
Hon. John Laird, 17<sup>th</sup> Senate District  
Hon. Robert Rivas, 29<sup>th</sup> Assembly District  
Hon. Dawn Addis, 30<sup>th</sup> Assembly District