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March 11, 2026

The Honorable Brian P. Kemp
Governor of Georgia
206 Washington Street,
111 State Capitol
Atlanta, GA 30334

Dear Governor Kemp

I write to urge you to submit a formal request to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for a major disaster declaration for the counties of Northeast Georgia severely impacted by Winter Storm Fern. I want to express my gratitude for the swift and effective response your administration mounted in the immediate aftermath of this devastating storm. I also want to specifically thank you for requesting an extension from FEMA to the disaster declaration deadline, now extended to March 12, 2026, to allow damage assessments to continue in the affected Northeast Georgia counties. These actions have made a meaningful difference for residents still working to recover.

As you well know, Winter Storm Fern struck Northeast Georgia as a multi-day weather event, bringing a dangerous combination of high winds, freezing rain, snow, and prolonged icy conditions. Ice accumulations exceeded half an inch in several Northeast Georgia communities. The storm's destructive ice and wind toppled trees and downed power lines across Northeast Georgia, leaving hundreds of thousands of Georgians without electricity – many for an extended period. While the storm's statewide footprint was relatively limited, its impact on Northeast Georgia was severe and concentrated, creating conditions that have overwhelmed the capacity of local governments to respond and recover on their own.

In the days following the storm, I personally traveled to White, Habersham, and Rabun Counties to witness the damage firsthand and meet with county officials, emergency responders, utility crews, and community members engaged in recovery efforts. I had the opportunity to tour American Red Cross-managed shelters, meet with Georgia National Guard troops deployed to the area, visit with Habersham EMC and Georgia Power crews working tirelessly to restore power, and receive briefings from county managers and public safety officials on the scope of storm impacts and the ongoing challenges facing their communities. What I observed was both a

testament to the resilience and dedication of Northeast Georgians and a clear demonstration of the considerable scale of damage left in Winter Storm Fern's wake.

During and since those visits, I have heard directly from local officials across Northeast Georgia about the financial strain this storm has placed on their communities. The damage caused by Winter Storm Fern is simply beyond the capacity of these counties' budgets to address alone. Local governments are facing costs associated with debris removal, infrastructure repair, and emergency response that exceed what their fiscal resources can sustain. They have made clear to me that without additional state or federal resources, a full and timely recovery will not be possible.

As you know, under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, the process for acquiring a Presidential major disaster declaration begins with the Governor. A gubernatorial request to FEMA is a prerequisite before the President may consider a declaration. That request initiates a formal assessment by FEMA of the damage, the state's capacity to respond, and whether federal assistance is warranted. Without your request, the path to federal relief is closed.

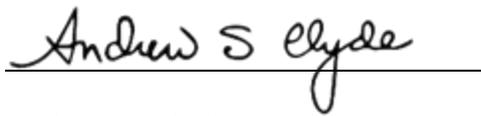
I must also note that the ongoing Democrat-led shutdown of the Department of Homeland Security has hampered FEMA's ability to provide timely responses and guidance on disaster-related matters, presenting additional challenges in navigating the process on behalf of affected Northeast Georgia communities.

I am aware of the thresholds FEMA uses to evaluate requests for major disaster declarations, including both per capita damage indicators at the state and county level. Based on the information available to me from county officials and state damage assessments, I understand that a number of the affected Northeast Georgia counties have met or exceeded FEMA's county-level damage thresholds. I also understand that, as currently assessed, the aggregate statewide damage may not meet FEMA's per capita threshold for the State of Georgia as a whole. This is largely because Winter Storm Fern's impact, while devastating for Northeast Georgia, was not felt as broadly across the state.

However, FEMA's regulations and policy guidance explicitly recognize that there are circumstances in which a disaster declaration may be warranted even when statewide thresholds are not met, specifically when a disaster produces high localized impacts concentrated in a limited geographic area. This is precisely the situation facing Northeast Georgia. The destruction caused by Winter Storm Fern was severe, concentrated, and has overwhelmed local resources – exactly the kind of localized impact that FEMA's guidelines contemplate as a basis for federal intervention. I am prepared to advocate with you to FEMA and to the President that the circumstances of Winter Storm Fern in Northeast Georgia satisfy this standard and justify a major disaster declaration.

I respectfully urge you to submit a request to FEMA for a major disaster declaration for the affected Northeast Georgia counties before the March 12, 2026 deadline. I am fully committed to supporting that request at every step of the federal review process. My office stands ready to engage with FEMA and the White House on behalf of these communities, and I will use every tool available to me as a Member of Congress to advocate in a fiscally responsible way for the resources Northeast Georgians need and deserve. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter with you and your staff at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Andrew S Clyde". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a solid horizontal line.

Andrew S. Clyde
Member of Congress