

# Hurricane Helene's Impact on Elections Administration

October 1, 2024

## Elections offices are dealing with fallout from the hurricane

Hurricane Helene has wreaked havoc throughout the Southeastern U.S., hitting Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee hardest. All six states declared a state of emergency over the weekend. Many roads have been completely washed out, cell service is non-existent in some areas, and homes and offices have lost access to power and clean water. In the most impacted areas, public utilities likely will not be restored for 30 days or more.

[Fourteen of the 22 western North Carolina county election offices](#) are currently closed. [In Florida](#), the Charlotte County office flooded and two polling locations in Pasco County are unusable. USPS delivery has been [suspended](#) in multiple zip codes across the region, pausing ballot and voter registration form delivery. In Upstate South Carolina, nearly [700,000 homes and offices are without power](#) (about half a million in Georgia), and flooding will prohibit full utility restoration for weeks.

Additionally, individual election workers have sustained total personal losses and many are still trying to locate loved ones.

## Elections offices face concerns that need to be addressed immediately

We haven't yet been able to make contact with all of the local election officials in regions that were hit hardest, based on news reports and our experience with past crises, these are some immediate needs:

**Ballot damage & delivery disruption.** Ballots that have been mailed out to voters in impacted areas are potentially a total loss. Voters may be displaced for 30 days or longer, further complicating mail ballot delivery.

**Poll worker & polling location losses.** Due to displacement & personal losses, a significant percentage of poll workers will not be able to serve, and replacements will need to be recruited.

Facility damage and ongoing disrupted water service will require moving & consolidating polling locations as was seen in 2016 after Hurricane Matthew.

Activating mobile voting units is an immediate response that can reach voters at hospitals, shelters, and replace destroyed polling locations at a cost of \$250,000 per unit and require less personnel to staff.

**Emergency changes to voting policy.** While we are not currently advocating for any changes, we are tracking the policy changes that come with emergency declarations, such as the waving of North Carolina's voter ID standard during a natural disaster state of emergency. It is critical that nonprofit groups and those communicating with voters have the latest information, as it will change quickly. Most state elections departments have committed to keeping their sites updated—we want to make sure that this information is consolidated and easily accessible.

## State elections departments need funding to navigate this emergency

We have requested via the National Security Council an immediate allocation of \$500,000 in FEMA or DHS funds be transferred to each affected state's statewide elections office to help get elections back online as quickly as possible. This is a short term bridge to support print-on-demand ballots, mobile voting units, hazard pay for poll workers, or communications to voters on radio or via SMS to inform them of location changes in the next five weeks. After the election concludes, we estimate that full recovery of these offices will exceed \$80 million or more pending comprehensive damage assessments.

## Further support will be needed before Election Day

Congress and state lawmakers should provide state elections departments with necessary emergency funding immediately. This is a critical part of a wrap-around strategy that State elections leaders and legislators may consider, such as waiving geographic or partisan poll worker restrictions, offering virtual poll worker training, or adjusting timelines to help offices meet staffing and other needs. Whatever issues emerge in the coming days and weeks, it is critical that decision makers move swiftly to support officials in executing a safe and secure election in November.

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