Tony Evers
Office of the Governor | State of Wisconsin

David Arnold, Associate Administrator
Office of Response and Recovery
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street Southwest
Washington, D.C. 20472

Through: C/O Fred Kaehler, Acting Regional Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency, Region 5
536 South Clark Street, Sixth Floor
Chicago, IL 60605

Dear Mr. Arnold:

I am writing to respectfully ask you to reconsider the denial of Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) assistance as a part of major disaster declaration FEMA-4949-DR. This request is pursuant to Section 401 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 5121-5207 (Stafford Act), and implemented by 44 CFR §§ 206.36 and 206.46.

The severe storms that hit four Wisconsin counties on July 27 produced a strong EF3 tornado and damaged over 2,300 homes as well as businesses, utilities, and public infrastructure. Over three months later, many homes are still in need of repair. While FEMA Individual Assistance and Public Assistance are available to provide some assistance, the circumstances of this disaster create a particular need for Hazard Mitigation funding to fill gaps and help these communities on the road to long-term recovery.

The path of the July 27 tornado tore through Neenah and Menasha along the shores of Lake Winnebago. The tornado's path damaged many homes located in a FEMA-designated floodplain near the lake (see attached Maps A and B). This means that they may not be repaired unless they are brought into compliance with their local floodplain ordinance. This work, which is entirely at the expense of the property owner and not covered by typical homeowners' insurance policies, may require elevation or demolition of the structure, with reconstruction of below-grade living space or basements prohibited. For many property owners, this will be an extreme and unmanageable financial burden, and HMGP is their only hope for assistance to complete this necessary work and come into compliance.

HMGP is also needed to reduce long-term vulnerabilities for these homeowners. The requirement to make homes safe from flooding may result in the elimination of below-grade living spaces and basements, which provided life-safety protection in this event. Ironically, this will increase the vulnerability of current and future property owners to severe weather, including high winds and tornadoes. HMGP funds could enable impacted homeowners to apply for funding for residential safe rooms, which would supply a rebate for residents without below-ground living space to still have protection during extreme weather events.

The State of Wisconsin is a high-risk state for tornadoes and high-wind events, where wind speeds of up to 250 mph are possible during severe storms. Wisconsin experienced 48 tornadoes in 2026, double our historical average, and four of these were damaging EF3 storms.

The EF3 tornado that hit Outagamie and Winnebago Counties on July 27 was on the ground for over 12 miles and nearly a mile wide at its peak, with peak wind speeds that reached 140 miles per hour, causing numerous injuries, and dozens of patients were transported to area hospitals.

HMGP funds are critical to enabling communities to build life-saving community tornado safe rooms that provide shelter. Wisconsin has a proven track record with these projects. One example is a safe room constructed by the School District of Abbotsford using federal funds. On May 15, 2025, two confirmed tornadoes threatened the area. The school district opened its community safe room and was able to shelter approximately 80 individuals, including the school baseball team, the track team, and other students, staff, and community members.

The July 27 storms also severely impacted critical community lifelines such as power, water, and communications. Restoration of power in some areas took longer than a week, and a water treatment facility was out of service for several weeks. HMGP funding is necessary to harden this infrastructure against future storms by burying power lines, installing emergency generators, and upgrading water and wastewater systems.

The State of Wisconsin takes our responsibility to the people of our state and our nation to be effective stewards of taxpayer dollars seriously. Over the past ten years, Wisconsin has repeatedly demonstrated the ability to efficiently implement projects, draw down funds, and close out HMGP grants. As the below table shows, Wisconsin has closed out 11 HMGP disasters consisting of 141 subgrants totaling nearly $41 million.

State of Wisconsin HMGP Closeouts, 2016 - 2026			
Disaster	**Subgrants**	**Federal Funds Disbursed**	**Closeout**
1966	8	$1,681,285.18	08/07/2017
1768	27	$18,505,752.00	08/07/2017
4076	11	$1,577,247.69	05/03/2018
4141	7	$936,756.76	12/20/2019
4276	13	$1,077,127.07	07/18/2023
4288	8	$1,534,196.17	09/29/2023
4343	11	$1,567,744.65	03/10/2025
4383	9	$1,882,569.80	09/12/2025
4402	29	$9,210,363.05	10/12/2026
4459	11	$3,102,364.48	07/06/2026
4477	7	$908,697.98	06/23/2026
TOTAL	**141**	**$41,984,104.83**	

In fact, Wisconsin has only one open HMGP disaster grant, DR-4520, which was awarded in 2021. The application period has been closed, and there is no funding available for additional projects. Nearly half of the subgrants under DR-4520 have been completed and closed, and funds obligated under DR-4520 have been disbursed.

FEMA-4520-DR-WI	
Federal funds awarded	$28,938,584.16
Federal funds disbursed	$13,324,270.05
Federal funds remaining	$15,614,314.11
Open subgrants	25
Closed subgrants	24

The $15.6 million in DR-4520 remaining unspent represents less than one-quarter of the funds awarded to Wisconsin since 2016 and less than 0.1 percent of the total HMGP funds reportedly obligated nationwide. The remaining projects are still open largely due to delays outside of the state's control. The delays include lengthy federal reviews due to the Benefit-Cost Analysis (BCA) and other complex federal requirements, staff turnover at FEMA, and past federal

government shutdowns. Approximately three-quarters of Wisconsin's outstanding balance is obligated in three large projects that were just recently awarded after protracted FEMA reviews. For example, a stormwater project in the City of Sheboygan was awarded by FEMA on March 4, 2026, five years after the city applied for the funds. That project alone accounts for $7.8 million of the total.

Of the 25 open subgrants, 17 are over 90 percent complete. Wisconsin Emergency Management (WEM) expects all subgrants to be completed by mid-2027, with closeout of the entire program complete before the end of 2027.

Using all available funds, implementing cost-effective projects, and closing grants timely are priorities for WEM's hazard mitigation program. This has allowed us to put in place and effectively execute a Program Administration by States (PAS) agreement with FEMA for the HMGP for every disaster declaration over the past ten years. This agreement allows WEM to take on greater program administration tasks, like approving demolition time extensions and hazard mitigation plan updates, to relieve FEMA of some of the burden. If Wisconsin receives additional HMGP funds, WEM is capable of taking on additional PAS responsibilities and potentially serving as a pilot for new FEMA processes to improve grant efficiency and disburse funds to communities more quickly.

In less than one year's time, the residents of the State of Wisconsin have recently been impacted by three significant events that have received Presidential major disaster declarations: severe storms and flooding in August 2025, severe storms, tornadoes and flooding in April 2026, and severe storms and tornadoes in July 2026. HMGP funding has been denied for all three of these disasters. Several communities impacted by the July storms were also impacted by the severe flooding in April. It is imperative that the HMGP is added to this declaration so the communities in our state are able to recover and prevent similar impacts from future disaster events while saving local, state, and federal taxpayer dollars.

Currently, Wisconsin does not have any open application periods for FEMA hazard mitigation grant opportunities. Therefore, there is no FEMA hazard mitigation funding available for these communities to apply for. In the coming months, the affected communities will implement pre-planned mitigation measures and investigate new ones to reduce the impact and cost of future threats and hazard events. However, without an open application period, available funding resources are virtually nonexistent. The need for mitigation funding far exceeds the state and local resources available.

The National Institute of Building Sciences publication *Natural Hazard Mitigation Saves: 2019 Report* shows that every federal dollar invested from hazard mitigation grants saves six dollars in future disaster costs. The evidence is clear: Investments in mitigation substantially reduce future expenses of taxpayer dollars for disaster response and recovery. Capitalizing on natural hazard mitigation is an unequivocally sensible investment. Authorizing the HMGP in the impacted communities will allow Wisconsin to leverage federal, state, and local dollars to prevent costly future damages.

Therefore, I am formally appealing the denial of the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program for the state. The state has an approved Enhanced State Hazard Mitigation Plan.

In closing, I want to reaffirm the urgency of this appeal request and emphasize the need to assist the survivors and communities as quickly as possible so that life can return to normal. Along with helping individuals throughout the state, investing in hazard mitigation measures provides an opportunity to reduce the taxpayer burden and future risk, and to eliminate repetitive, expensive damages in these communities. Through strategic implementation of cost-effective mitigation measures, the State of Wisconsin, in conjunction with the impacted communities, has an opportunity to reduce the financial burden of future disasters to taxpayers and build a more resilient state and nation.

I urge you to reverse your denial of Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funding for the State of Wisconsin without delay.

Respectfully,



Tony Evers

Governor

Enclosures

Damage Assessments within Flood Hazard Area (Map A)
Damage Assessments within Flood Hazard Area (Map B)