

North Carolina's Hurricane Relief Stalls

In their third session after Hurricane Helene devastated Western North Carolina in September, state legislators again fail to pass meaningful disaster relief.



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-- In the few short days of their November session, North Carolina's legislative majority overrode Governor Cooper's veto of [House Bill 10](#) to add hundreds of millions to private school voucher funding. They also pushed through [Senate Bill 382](#) titled "Disaster Relief - 3/Budget/Various Law Changes. This was their third opportunity to allocate funds to disaster relief efforts to help Western North Carolina recover from Hurricane Helene.

Despite its title, SB382 provides very little in the way of disaster relief. It moves \$227 million from the state savings reserve—which has more than \$4 BILLION available to spend (1)—to to the Helene Fund. However, the bill only appropriates \$2 million for technical consultation for soil and water districts affected by the hurricane (in another section of the bill), leaving the remaining \$225 sitting in the fund until the legislature takes further action.

The bill's text reads..."the State Controller shall transfer the sum of two hundred twenty-seven million dollars (\$227,000,000) from the Savings Reserve to the Helene Fund and, except as otherwise provided in this act, the funds shall remain unspent until appropriated by an act of the General Assembly."

Other sections of the bill allocate \$25 million for debris removal and nearly \$34 million for child center grants to help facilities affected by the hurricane to remain open.

And that's all for new disaster relief in November.

Lawmakers in the House were given less than two hours to read the 131-page bill before debating and voting on it. The Senate passed the bill the next day. Governor Cooper vetoed SB382 the following Tuesday. On December 2, the Senate overrode the veto.(2) The House will vote on a possible veto override later in December.

In previous sessions, the legislature unanimously passed two disaster relief bills totaling \$877 million. In a sharp departure from the previous disaster relief bills, SB382 is light on disaster relief and heavy on an assortment of unrelated law changes that the majority party wants to push through before losing their veto-proof majority in January. As a result, SB382 passed mostly along party lines, with some Western NC Republicans joining Democrats in opposition.

Hurricane Helene damage estimates [top \\$53 billion](#); with less than \$1 billion in state funds allocated to date, North Carolina is falling far short of what's needed.

1. NCGA allocates billions for opaque "Reserve Funds" :<https://www.carolinajournal.com/ncga-allocates-billions-for-opaque-reserve-funds/#:~:text=However%2C%20currently%20containing%20around%20%244.75,to%20withstand%20a%20financial%20downturn>

2. Despite protests, NC Senate overrides Cooper's veto of bill that shifts executive power: <https://ncnewsline.com/2024/12/02/despite-protests-nc-senate-overrides-coopers-veto-of-bill-that-shifts-executive-power/>

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