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Congress of the United States
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COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE
(U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION)

August 24, 2026

The Honorable Bill Lee
Governor of Tennessee
State Capitol
600 Dr. Martin L. King, Jr. Boulevard
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Governor Lee,

I strongly urge you to request assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), under the provisions of Section 501 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. 5121-5207 (Stafford Act), and implemented by 44 CFR 206.35, for Shelby County in response to the severe storms that struck Memphis and Shelby County on Saturday, August 22.

The powerful storm brought winds exceeding 80 miles per hour and caused extensive damage to trees, utility poles, power lines, homes, and other infrastructure throughout our community. At the height of the storm, more than 140,000 Memphis Light, Gas and Water (MLGW) customers were without power. MLGW has since determined that this was the seventh most damaging storm in its history based on outage impact and the number of circuits affected.

While MLGW crews have made significant progress, the scope of the damage remains substantial. As of Monday morning, over 45,000 customers and constituents of mine remain without power. MLGW has deployed hundreds of its own employees and brought in dozens of additional outside crews, with approximately 700 to 800 personnel working across the service area to restore power. More than 200 tree-trimming personnel are also assisting with the recovery.

MLGW has advised customers to prepare to be without power for multiple days because of the extensive number of downed and damaged trees, poles, and wires. The storm also affected water treatment facilities, schools, roadways, and other critical infrastructure. Memphis-Shelby County Schools were forced to close on Monday because of widespread outages affecting dozens of schools and administrative buildings.

The severity and widespread impact of this storm have placed a significant burden on Memphis and Shelby County residents, local governments, utilities, and emergency response agencies. Given the scale of the damage and the resources required for recovery, I believe a swift request for federal disaster

assistance is prudent to ensure Shelby County has access to all available resources to address the damage and support affected residents.

I respectfully urge you to act expeditiously to seek the appropriate federal assistance for Shelby County and stand ready to assist in any way necessary to support such a request.

As always, I remain,

Most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Steve Cohen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress