

Title: **No ice storm match in proposed budget**
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No ice storm match in proposed budget

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South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley's budget recommendations for the upcoming fiscal year will not include a state match to local governments for February 2014 ice storm expenses.



Haley

Traditionally, local governments will shell out more than half of the cost to cover storm recovery and emergency services after a disaster declaration is announced, and states then handle additional costs to alleviate some of the financial pressure off the local governments and agencies.

But nearly a year after Haley's initial request for a state match to both the Senate Finance Chairman Hugh Leatherman and Brian White, the chairman of the House Ways and

Means Committee, that request appears to be gone.

"The governor's recommendation last year to provide this funding for local governments supplemented her (fiscal year) 2014-15 Executive Budget proposal, which was released before the winter storms affected South Carolina, and the General Assembly

chose not to support this proposal," Chaney Adams, Haley's press secretary, said via email. "Accordingly, the recommendation was not included in the (fiscal year) 2015-16 Executive Budget," which was released in January.

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Haley's initial fund requests

S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley requested

in May that state representatives appropriate about \$16.5 million of these additional nonrecurring funds to counties and state agencies that have unreimbursed expenses stemming from the February 2014 ice storm.

Here is a breakdown of where Haley asked those funds be sent.

- **Affected counties:** \$16,060,894
- **Department of Public Safety:** \$153,331
- **S.C. National Guard:** \$128,958
- **Department of Mental Health:** \$81,750
- **Department of Natural Resources:** \$40,877
- **S.C. Emergency Management Division:** \$25,000
- **S.C. State Law Enforcement Division:** \$6,530

FUNDS

CONTINUED from 1A

Aiken County Administrator Clay Killian said the recent comment was "a little surprising."

"It is a little surprising because, traditionally, in declared disasters, the state has picked up at least a portion of the match," Killian said. "We are hopeful that the state may still consider some portion of

the match."



Hixon

In March 2014, President Barack Obama signed a declaration to grant federal reimbursement to areas impacted by the Febru-

ary ice storm, also known as Winter Storm Pax, after declaring South Carolina a state of emergency.

This prompted a letter from Haley to Leatherman and White in May 2014, outlining funding requests to agencies with expenses that had not yet been reimbursed.

"Since January (2014), South Carolina was struck by a series of severe winter storms that

have left local governments facing significant clean-up costs," Haley wrote in the letter. "Although the (South Carolina) Emergency Management Division (EMD) continues to work with counties and state agencies to determine the precise amounts that the federal government will not reimburse, it is clear that many of those organizations will not be able to absorb these expenses

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on their own.”

For Aiken County and the 21 other counties hit by the ice storm, Haley requested about \$16 million of additional non-recurring funds go toward recovery and emergency costs, including those for municipalities, and about \$153,000 to go toward departments of public safety.

Aiken County spent a total of about \$33.2 million to pick up more than 1 million cubic yards of debris, clean up debris and enact recovery and emergency services after the ice storm, according to Killian.

To date, the County has received federal reimbursement of nearly \$22 million out of the expected \$27 million from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA.

That now leaves the County paying about \$6.1 million out of pocket.

“Aiken County was one of

22 counties declared a disaster area; we were, by far, the worst hit,” Killian said to Aiken County Legislative Delegation members in a meeting Monday. “Some of the more rural counties, they saw the magnitude of the storm and just did the basics – they cleared the roads but didn’t help people get rid of their debris ... We tried to do the full service deal.”

Not every county was as lucky as Aiken County, said Tommy Thompson, the County’s Emergency Services director.

“Because of the approved management of budgeting, we (Aiken County) did have some funds to cover areas where it was needed,” Thompson said. “But some smaller counties are having to lay people off, or some are even facing bankruptcy; they just can’t come up with the money.”

S.C. Rep. Bill Hixon, R-North Augusta, who at-

tended Monday’s meeting, told Killian and Council members it was his impression that the governor did not budget any

storm funds.



Killian

“I never got a clear answer why they did not have that money in her budget,” Hixon told the *Aiken Standard*.

“I was surprised, especially when I was there at her press conference and she was going to help make us all whole again ... I hate to see, like my little county in Edgefield, I think they only want 40-something-thousand dollars; that to them is a tremendous amount of money.”

This time last year, Thompson sent two almost identical letters out – one to S.C. Emergency Management Di-

vision Director Kim Stenson, and one to S.C. Emergency Management Association President Sam Hodge – encouraging both to ensure that Haley and the State Legislature become aware of the importance to have the “non-federal matching funds portion of the anticipated FEMA reimbursement absorbed” by the state.

One year later, Thompson said it’s his own “personal crusade” to keep educating and talking with representatives about the critical nature of these funds.

Maayan Schechter is the local government reporter with *Aiken Standard*. Follow her on Twitter @MaayanSchechter.

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STAFF PHOTO BY MAAYAN SCHECHTER

Members of the Aiken County Legislative Delegation, which included S.C. Sen. Tom Young, R-Aiken, right, listened to Aiken County Council members and staff discuss their concerns on a number of state issues, during a meeting Monday. At left is Council Chairman Ronnie Young.



STAFF PHOTO BY MICHAEL ULMER

Members of the Aiken County Legislative Delegation, including from left, S.C. Rep. Bill Clyburn, D-Aiken; S.C. Rep. Don Wells, R-Aiken; S.C. Rep. Bill Hixon, R-North Augusta; S.C. Rep. Bill Taylor, R-Aiken; S.C. Sen. Nikki Setzler, D-Lexington; S.C. Sen. Shane Massey, R-Edgefield; and S.C. Rep. Chris Corley, R-Graniteville, (not pictured) listened to concerns from Aiken County Council members and staff Monday night.

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AIKEN STANDARD FILE PHOTO BY TEDDY KULMALA

Days after Winter Storm Pax touched down in Aiken County last year, S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley, standing next to residents and members of the Aiken County Legislative Delegation, addressed reporters and residents on the damage done to the county from the February 2014 ice storm.