NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT COMMERCE

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N.C. Department of Commerce Marks 2025 Milestones in Helene Recovery Efforts Across Western North Carolina

RALEIGH, N.C.

Throughout 2025, the North Carolina Department of Commerce has played a central role in supporting western North Carolina's recovery after Hurricane Helene, including delivering housing assistance, workforce support, and economic recovery resources to help communities stabilize and rebuild. Through coordinated efforts across multiple Commerce divisions, the state has assisted thousands of families, workers, and small businesses while laying the foundation for long-term resilience and economic strength.

"Western North Carolina has shown extraordinary strength and determination in the wake of Helene," **said Governor Josh Stein**. "From getting families back into

safe homes to helping workers and small businesses regain their financial footing, these recovery efforts by the state's Commerce Department demonstrate our commitment to standing with mountain communities for as long as it takes."

Housing Recovery

Housing recovery has remained a cornerstone of the state's response. Through the Division of Community Revitalization (DCR), the Renew NC (https://renewnc.org/) Single-Family Housing Program has received more than 7,000 applications as of December 31, reflecting both the scale of need and strong community engagement across western North Carolina. The first home repair under Renew NC was completed on August 27, making North Carolina the fastest state in more than a decade to begin rebuilding homes with HUD funding following a major hurricane.

For homeowner Matalene Waters, whose Henderson County home sustained storm damage during Helene, the Renew NC Single-Family Housing Program provided critical repairs that allow her to safely remain in her home and community as recovery continues.







To ensure eligible homeowners have every opportunity to apply for assistance – particularly given the ongoing need and the challenges of the busy holiday season – Governor Stein has extended the Renew NC Single-Family Housing Program application deadline to January 31, 2026. The program emphasizes a “neighbors helping neighbors” approach, with local staff, in-person intake centers, multiple application options, and a real-time public dashboard that tracks applications by county and status for transparency and accountability.

Building on these efforts, DCR also launched a second recovery initiative in 2025 – the Renew NC Small Rental Rehabilitation Program – to support landlords of smaller rental properties of up to 5 units. This newly launched program is designed to help restore much-needed affordable rental housing stock, strengthening local housing markets and supporting workforce stability in communities impacted by Helene.

"Recovery requires sustained focus and coordinated action," **said N.C. Commerce Secretary Lee Lilley.** "Our teams have worked closely with local leaders and community partners to deliver solutions that respond to immediate needs while preparing western North Carolina for long-term success. As we move into 2026, Commerce remains fully committed to supporting families, workers, and businesses as recovery continues."

Workforce Recovery

Workforce recovery efforts have been led by the Division of Employment Security (DES) and the Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) in partnership with local workforce boards and NCWorks Career Centers.

In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, DES delivered rapid assistance to workers whose livelihoods were disrupted by storm damage and business closures. As of the end of 2025, DES had processed more than 36,000 disaster-related unemployment and Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA) claims, administering
$96.6 million in employment benefits to eligible workers – surpassing totals seen in previous hurricane recovery efforts and providing a critical financial bridge for impacted households.

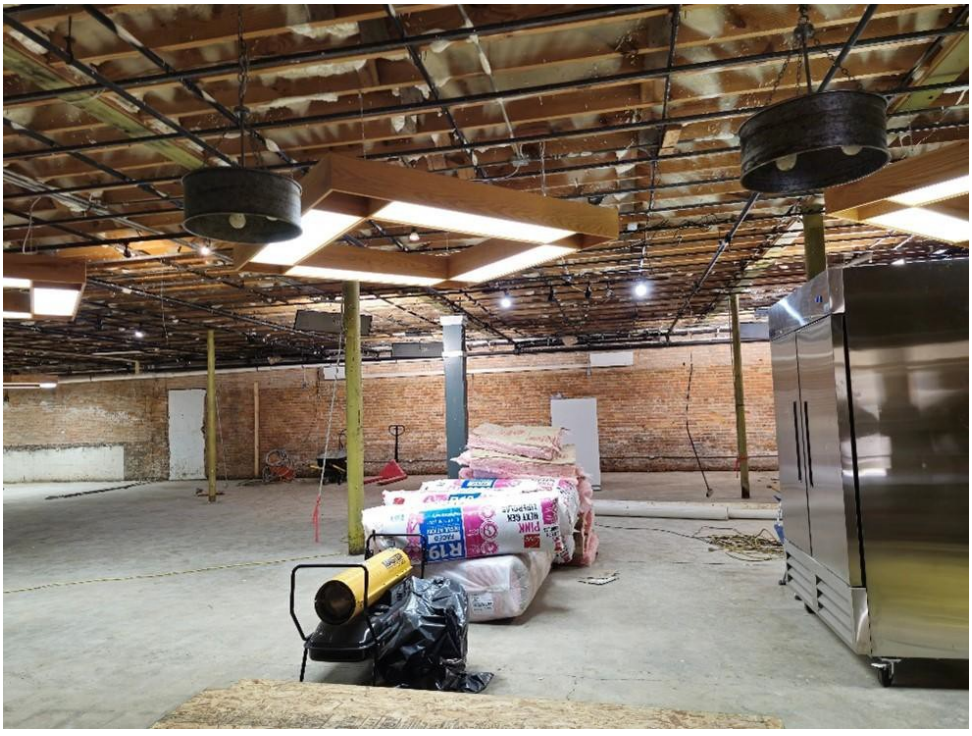
DWS has administered a federal Dislocated Worker Grant in partnership with local workforce boards, supporting more than 300 individuals through temporary employment, training, and supportive services in Helene-impacted counties. In addition, NCWorks Career Centers and mobile units have hosted more than 340 hiring events across western North Carolina since Helene,

connecting thousands of jobseekers with employers and disaster-recovery employment opportunities. Specialized recovery job listings continue to be available through NCWorks.gov

Under the Governor's Rapid Response program, the Helene Business Edge Fund provided $500,000 to local workforce development boards in the most impacted regions to help minimize layoffs and support recovery. To date, three workforce boards – Foothills, High Country, and Mountain Area – have received these funds, totaling $320,000. In turn, the boards have so far awarded grants to 16 employers totaling more than $144,600, helping them retain 269 impacted employees.

Across the region, these investments are translating into real-world results for families, workers, businesses, and communities.

In Mitchell County, DT's Blue Ridge Java in Spruce Pine was able to stabilize operations and rebuild its business with support from the federal Dislocated Worker Grant Program and from the Helene Business Edge Fund. Through staffing assistance and workforce services coordinated by the local NCWorks Career Center, the coffee shop/cafe was able to meet critical staffing needs during recovery while providing displaced workers with income, training, and a pathway back into the labor force.







Economic Recovery

Economic recovery for small businesses has also advanced through Commerce's rural development and business support programs.

The Rural Economic Development Division's Small Business Infrastructure Grant

Program (SmBIZ) has made available grants of up to $1 million to help local governments rebuild critical infrastructure that supports small businesses, with communities across western North Carolina actively applying.

In Bryson City, funding through Commerce's Rural Economic Development Division (REDD) will support a critical water infrastructure project to strengthen system capacity damaged by Helene. The project will help ensure reliable water service for downtown businesses, residents, and visitors while laying the groundwork for long-term economic resilience and future growth.

As the state takes stock more than one year since Hurricane Helene, communities across western North Carolina are reopening, rebuilding, and welcoming residents and visitors alike. While significant progress has been made, recovery is ongoing. In 2026, the North Carolina Department of Commerce will continue working alongside the Governor's Recovery Office for Western North Carolina, other state agencies, local governments, nonprofits, businesses, and residents – remaining present on the ground, sharing information and resources, and renewing its commitment to helping western North Carolina build back stronger and more resilient for the future.

For more information on Commerce Department recovery programs and resources, visit www.commerce.nc.gov

For more information about the state's recovery efforts for western North Carolina, visit http s://www.wncrecovery.nc.gov/