

# REFORMING DISASTER RECOVERY ACT OF 2019

**N**LHC and its Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition (DHRC) of more than 800 local, state, and national organizations support the *Reforming Disaster Recovery Act*, introduced by Senators Todd Young (R-IN) and Brian Schatz (D-HI) and Representatives Ann Wagner (R-MO) and Al Green (D-TX).

If enacted, the *Reforming Disaster Recovery Act* would permanently authorize the Community Development Block Grant - Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program, which provides states and communities with flexible, long-term recovery resources needed to rebuild affordable housing and infrastructure after a disaster. The bill also provides important safeguards and tools to help ensure that federal disaster recovery efforts reach all impacted households, including the lowest-income seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, people experiencing homelessness, and other individuals who are often hardest-hit by disasters and have the fewest resources to recover.

## KEY REFORMS

### Targeting Resources to Those with the Greatest Need

While CDBG-DR is often one of the only recovery tools available to the lowest-income disaster survivors, vital resources have been diverted after past disasters from the people and communities with the greatest need and for whom the program was designed to serve. The *Reforming Disaster Recovery Act* would help ensure that limited disaster recovery funds reach the most vulnerable survivors.

Key reforms:

- Requiring that federal disaster recovery dollars are equitably distributed, balancing the needs of homeowners, renters, and people experiencing homelessness;
- Requiring that the use of federal recovery funds is balanced between rebuilding infrastructure and housing;
- Requiring that federal recovery dollars help replace already scarce affordable housing for low-income residents by prioritizing the one-for-one replacement of damaged or destroyed public or federally subsidized rental housing;
- Maintaining the current requirement that 70 percent of the federal recovery funds benefit low- and moderate-income people and sets



*Flooding in Houston, TX.*

*Photo: Revolution Messaging/Arun Chaudhary*

clearer direction to HUD on it can adjust this requirement;

- Providing survivors with a clear appeal process to ensure that all households receive the full amount of assistance for which they are eligible;
- Requiring that HUD allocate federal disaster assistance money within 60 days after Congress approves CDBG-DR funding; and
- Requiring opportunities for public input on plans for the use of federal disaster assistance money.

### Prioritizing Data Transparency & Oversight

After past disasters, the lack of federal data transparency at hampered efforts to effectively target and distribute aid to those most in need. The *Reforming Disaster Recovery Act* would allow all federal agencies involved to access the

full breadth of data needed to make informed public policy decisions, allow greater public participation in disaster recovery efforts, and help public and private entities better recognize gaps in services and identify reforms needed for future disaster recovery efforts.

Key reforms:

- Requiring federal agencies to share all data to help coordinate disaster recovery;
- Requiring HUD to make publicly available all data collected and analyzed during the course of the disaster recovery, including data on damage caused by the disaster, how any federal assistance was spent and information on the disasters effect on education, transportation capabilities, housing needs, and displacement;
- Requiring states receiving federal recovery dollars to publish contracts and agreements with third parties to carry out disaster recovery efforts;
- Authorizing the release of data to academic institutions to conduct research on the equitable distribution of recovery funds, adherence to civil rights protections, and other disaster recovery-related topics;
- Requiring that the HUD Inspector General to help ensure that disaster recovery programs serve all eligible households, in addition to preventing waste, fraud and abuse; and
- Requiring states to include detailed plans outlining how it will use CDBG-DR funds and how these dollars will address relief, resiliency, long-term recovery, restoration of manufactured housing in the most impacted areas.

## Protecting Civil Rights and Fair Housing

The *Reforming Disaster Recovery Act* would

help protect fundamental civil rights and fair housing rights and ensure that all communities and community members – regardless of race, disability, sex, age, color, religion, familial status, national origin, and other protected classes – receive full access to disaster recovery resources, free from discrimination.

Key reforms:

- Requiring states to create a plan to ensure compliance with federal fair housing obligations; and
- Requiring HUD to release information regarding disaster recovery efforts, disaggregated by race, geography and all protected classes of individuals under federal civil rights and nondiscrimination laws, as well as existing disaster assistance laws.

## Encouraging Mitigation and Resiliency

With disasters increasing in frequency and intensity, at-risk communities must better prepare housing and infrastructure to withstand future disasters. By promoting mitigation and resiliency, the *Reforming Disaster Recovery Act* will help ensure that communities are better able to maintain vital services during and directly after a disaster and recover more efficiently.

Key reforms:

- Requiring rebuilt or substantially repaired structures located in flood areas to meet mitigation standards; and
- Requiring any infrastructure repaired or constructed with federal recovery dollars to have the minimum standard of protection from floods and storm waters.

## SENATE VERSION

The Senate version of the *Reforming Disaster Recovery Act* includes additional reforms to help increase the efficiency, oversight, and effectiveness of the CDBG-DR program.

### Key Reforms:

- Establishing an Office of Disaster Recovery and Resilient Communities at HUD to coordinate with other federal agencies, develop and share best practices, and provide training to state and local agencies on disaster recovery;
- Requiring HUD, FEMA, and SBA to develop a common application form for assistance across federal agencies, streamlining and simplifying the process for survivors;
- Allowing HUD to more quickly allocate funding after a disaster to address the housing needs of people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness;
- Encouraging states to better align federal recovery funding with existing state and local infrastructure investments;
- Allowing funds to be used to provide case management services to help survivors better identify, understand and access federal assistance;
- Requiring HUD, FEMA, and USDA to report to Congress on ways to improve the transition from emergency disaster housing response to long-term housing recovery; and
- Requiring the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to analyze the effectiveness of federal disaster recovery programs in addressing the needs of survivors at different income levels and protected classes and the impact of disasters on the housing crisis.



*A Destroyed Mobile Home Park in the Florida Keys  
Saul Loeb | AFP | Getty Images*

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