

The Regional Impact of Disasters and Emergencies Relief Act

Senators Elizabeth Warren and Ted Cruz & Representatives Brian Babin and John Garamendi

Under the *Stafford Act*, the federal government can provide assistance and funding to communities recovering from major disasters when the President has determined that state and local governments do not have the resources to respond on their own. However, the rules for distributing disaster relief do not always reflect the on-the-ground experience of communities that have experienced major disasters.

With natural disasters on the rise and causing more damage than ever before, the *Regional Impact of Disasters and Emergencies Relief Act* would amend the *Stafford Act* to improve the delivery of federal relief to disaster-struck communities. Specifically, the bill would:

- **Allow all communities directly affected by a major disaster to receive federal relief, regardless of county or state lines.** The bill would allow the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to distribute relief to any area that is contiguous to an area where the President has declared a major disaster, even if the contiguous area is not in the same state where the disaster was declared. This provision would improve the distribution of disaster relief funds by recognizing that disasters do not neatly follow county or state lines.
- **Enable FEMA to declare major disasters based on cumulative damage to a community.** The bill would modify the definition of “major disaster” to include cumulative disasters over the preceding 12-month period for which the Governor sought a major disaster declaration, even if none of the disasters individually reached the thresholds for federal relief. This provision responds to concerns that existing federal regulations do not sufficiently account for the impact of cumulative disasters on a region.

To ensure effective implementation of these provisions, the bill requires FEMA to issue interim guidance within 60 days of the bill’s enactment and to issue implementing rules and regulations within 18 months of the bill’s enactment.