

REFORMING DISASTER RECOVERY ACT

NLHC and its Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition (DHRC) of more than 850 local, state, and national organizations support the [Reforming Disaster Recovery Act](#), introduced by Senators Brian Schatz (D-HI), Susan Collins (R-ME), Patty Murray (D-WA), Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-MS), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Roger Wicker (R-MS), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Bill Cassidy (R-LA), Jon Tester (D-MT), Thom Tillis (R-NC), Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM), Todd Young (R-IN), Cory Booker (D-NJ), and Alex Padilla (D-CA).

If enacted, the *Reforming Disaster Recovery Act* would permanently authorize the Community Development Block Grant - Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program, which provides states, tribes, 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 and most marginalized survivors who are often hardest-hit by disasters and have the fewest resources to recover.

KEY REFORMS

Quickly Targeting Resources to Those with the Greatest Needs

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 needs 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:

- Creating a standing disaster recovery fund that can quickly disperse initial recovery funding to disaster-stricken areas without waiting for congressional approval;
- Developing a formula to allocate assistance to the most impacted and distressed areas resulting from a major disaster;
- Requiring that the use of federal recovery funds is balanced between rebuilding infrastructure and housing;
- Ensuring that housing funds must be spent proportionally between homeowners and renters unless the Secretary determines that there is a compelling need;



Flooding in Houston, TX.

Photo: Revolution Messaging/Arun Chaudhary

- Requiring states to prioritize activities that help extremely low-, low-, and moderate-income survivors recover, address pre- and post-disaster housing needs, and prepare for future disasters; and
- Maintaining the current requirement that 70 percent of the federal recovery funds benefit low- and moderate-income people and providing clearer direction to HUD on when it can adjust this requirement.

Prioritizing Data Transparency & Oversight

After past disasters, the lack of federal data transparency has 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 available a public facing dashboard summarizing project data;
- Ensuring that state action plans receive at least 14 days for public comment and requiring states to engage with residents of the most impacted and distressed areas; and
- Requiring states to include detailed plans outlining how it will use CDBG-DR funds to serve low- and moderate-income households and how these dollars will address relief, resiliency, long-term recovery, restoration of housing and infrastructure in the most impacted and distressed 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 state and local governments to certify that funds will be administered in compliance with fair housing and civil rights laws;
- Requiring HUD to release information - disaggregated by income, race, geography and all protected classes of individuals under

federal civil rights and nondiscrimination laws; and

- 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.

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:

- Establishing an Office of Disaster Management and Resiliency at HUD to coordinate with other federal agencies, develop and share best practices, and coordinate technical assistance and training to state and local agencies on disaster recovery and mitigation best practices;
- Creating specific minimum construction standards for areas designated as Hazard-Prone by HUD and FEMA;
- Providing grantees with additional resources for mitigation; and
- Encouraging states to better align federal recovery funding with existing state and local infrastructure investments.

For more information, contact Noah Patton,
NLIHC Senior Policy Analyst for Disaster Recovery at npatton@nlihc.org.