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(Original Signature of Member)

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. _____

To provide for the continuation of FEMA operations during a lapse in appropriations, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. BELL introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee
on _____

A BILL

To provide for the continuation of FEMA operations during
a lapse in appropriations, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Relief Without Delay
5 Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. CONTINUATION OF FEMA OPERATIONS DURING A**
2 **LAPSE IN APPROPRIATIONS.**

3 Notwithstanding any other provision of law, in the
4 event of a lapse in appropriations, the Administrator of
5 FEMA shall—

6 (1) continue all disaster relief, recovery, and
7 mitigation operations funded through the Disaster
8 Relief Fund;

9 (2) obligate and disburse Disaster Relief Fund
10 balances for all existing and future disaster declara-
11 tions, including individual and public assistance
12 under sections 403, 406, 407, 408, and 502 of the
13 Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency
14 Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5170b, 5172, 5173, 5174,
15 and 5192); and

16 (3) maintain personnel and contract support
17 necessary to ensure uninterrupted processing of
18 claims and payments.

19 **SEC. 3. USE OF DISASTER RELIEF FUND.**

20 (a) AVAILABILITY.—All unobligated balances in the
21 Disaster Relief Fund shall remain available to the Admin-
22 istrator of FEMA for expenditure during a lapse in appro-
23 priations.

24 (b) PROHIBITION ON DIVERSION.—No funds from
25 the Disaster Relief Fund may be withheld, sequestered,
26 or reprogrammed during a lapse in appropriations, except

1 as necessary to comply with section 1341 of title 31,
2 United States Code (commonly referred to as the “Anti-
3 Deficiency Act”).

4 **SEC. 4. EXCEPTION FROM GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN RE-**
5 **STRICTIONS.**

6 For purposes of section 1341 of title 31, United
7 States Code (commonly referred to as the “Anti-Defi-
8 ciency Act”), operations of FEMA authorized under this
9 Act shall be considered essential to protect human life and
10 property, and therefore exempt from shutdown restric-
11 tions.

12 **SEC. 5. REPORTING ON DISASTER RELIEF FUND OBLIGA-**
13 **TIONS AND DISBURSEMENTS.**

14 (a) REPORTING.—Not later than 60 days after the
15 date of enactment of this Act, and monthly thereafter, the
16 Administrator of FEMA shall submit to the appropriate
17 committees of Congress a report on the status of all
18 projects and activities funded through the Disaster Relief
19 Fund.

20 (b) CONTENTS OF REPORT.—Each monthly report
21 under subsection (a) shall include, with respect to the pre-
22 ceding month—

23 (1) the total unobligated balance of the Dis-
24 aster Relief Fund;

1 (2) the total amount of Disaster Relief Fund
2 funds obligated;

3 (3) the total amount of Disaster Relief Fund
4 funds disbursed;

5 (4) a breakdown by disaster declaration (major
6 disaster or emergency), including—

7 (A) the name and date of each declaration;

8 (B) the States, territories, or tribal areas
9 affected;

10 (C) the total funds obligated to date;

11 (D) the total funds disbursed to date; and

12 (E) the percentage of obligated funds that
13 have been disbursed;

14 (5) a list of all public assistance project sub-
15 mitted for approval and obligation;

16 (6) a list of all projects that have been ap-
17 proved for obligation;

18 (7) a list of all funds for projects that have
19 been disbursed;

20 (8) a list of all projects for which obligation de-
21 cisions remain pending for more than 180 days; and

22 (9) any funds withheld, deferred, or repro-
23 grammed for future use, with an explanation of the
24 reason and estimated disbursement timeline.

1 (c) PUBLIC AVAILABILITY.—The Administrator shall
2 make each report required under this section publicly
3 available on the website of the Federal Emergency Man-
4 agement Agency not later than 10 days after the submis-
5 sion of each report.

6 (d) STANDARDIZATION OF REPORTING.—Not later
7 than 90 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the
8 Administrator shall establish a uniform reporting template
9 for Disaster Relief Fund obligation and disbursement
10 data, consistent with Federal open data standards, and
11 update such data on a rolling monthly basis.

12 (e) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

13 (1) OBLIGATION.—The term “obligation”
14 means a legally binding commitment by the Federal
15 Emergency Management Agency to make payments
16 under specific disaster recovery programs or
17 projects.

18 (2) APPROPRIATE COMMITTEES OF CON-
19 GRESS.—The term “appropriate committees of Con-
20 gress” means the Committees on Appropriations and
21 Transportation and Infrastructure of the House of
22 Representatives and the Committees on Appropria-
23 tions and Homeland Security and Governmental Af-
24 fairs of the Senate.

1 **SEC. 6. UNMET NEEDS ASSESSMENT REQUIRED.**

2 The Secretary of Housing and Urban Development
3 shall, not later than 60 days after a the President declares
4 a major disaster under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster
5 Relief and Emergency Assistance Act and quarterly there-
6 after—

7 (1) use Federal disaster and housing data avail-
8 able to the Secretary to—

9 (A) evaluate damage to housing and infra-
10 structure in the area impacted by the disaster;
11 and

12 (B) identify shortages in affordable hous-
13 ing and broader economic recovery needs; and

14 (2) submit to the Congress a report about the
15 analysis conducted under paragraph (1) that identi-
16 fies any unmet needs in the area impacted by the
17 disaster that could be addressed using amounts ap-
18 propriated for Community Development Block Grant
19 Disaster Recovery and other related Federal disaster
20 programs.

21 **SEC. 7. NATIONAL TORNADO DETECTION AND WARNING IM-**
22 **PROVEMENT PLAN.**

23 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator of NOAA, in
24 coordination with the Administrator of FEMA, shall es-
25 tablish a program to improve tornado detection, fore-
26 casting, and warning capabilities.

1 (b) PROGRAM ELEMENTS.—The program established
2 under subsection (a) shall include—

3 (1) investment in next-generation radar, sat-
4 ellite, and sensor technologies;

5 (2) development of advanced forecasting mod-
6 els, including the use of artificial intelligence and
7 machine learning;

8 (3) expansion of localized, impact-based warn-
9 ing systems;

10 (4) improvements to warning systems; and

11 (5) integration of Federal forecasting capabili-
12 ties into State and local emergency management sys-
13 tems.

14 **SEC. 8. COMMUNITY TORNADO RESILIENCE GRANT PRO-**
15 **GRAM.**

16 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Administrator of FEMA
17 shall establish a program to award grants to State and
18 local emergency management agencies to support tornado
19 preparedness and resilience in high-risk areas.

20 (b) ELIGIBLE USES.—Grants awarded under this
21 section may be used for—

22 (1) construction or retrofitting of community
23 storm shelters, including shelters located in schools,
24 mobile home communities, and other high-risk loca-
25 tions;

1 (2) installation or modernization of warning
2 systems;

3 (3) deployment of backup power for warning
4 systems;

5 (4) development of local emergency prepared-
6 ness plans and public education initiatives; and

7 (5) other projects determined appropriate by
8 the Administrator to enhance tornado resilience.

9 (c) PRIORITY.—In awarding grants under this sec-
10 tion, the Administrator shall prioritize—

11 (1) communities with high tornado risk;

12 (2) underserved and low-income communities;
13 and

14 (3) communities with limited access to existing
15 warning systems or shelters.

16 **SEC. 9. INTERAGENCY COORDINATION.**

17 The Administrator of NOAA and the Administrator
18 of FEMA shall coordinate with State, local, Tribal, and
19 territorial governments to improve tornado preparedness
20 and response, including by—

21 (1) data sharing and integration of forecasting
22 systems;

23 (2) joint planning for emergency response; and

24 (3) support for public education and outreach
25 campaigns.

1 **SEC. 10. REPORT TO CONGRESS.**

2 (a) IN GENERAL.—Upon implementation of this Act,
3 the Administrator of NOAA, in coordination with the Ad-
4 ministrator of FEMA, shall submit to the appropriate con-
5 gressional committees a report on such implementation.

6 (b) CONTENTS.—The report required under sub-
7 section (a) shall include a description of—

8 (1) any improvements in tornado detection and
9 forecasting capabilities;

10 (2) the status of upgrades to warning systems;

11 (3) grants awarded under section 8, and how
12 such grants have been used to support tornado pre-
13 paredness and resilience;

14 (4) any remaining gaps in tornado preparedness
15 and resilience; and

16 (5) any recommendations for further legislative
17 or administrative action.

18 (c) APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES DE-
19 FINED.—In this section, the term “appropriate congres-
20 sional committees” means—

21 (1) the Committees on Transportation and In-
22 frastructure, Science, Space, and Technology, and
23 Appropriations of the House of Representatives; and

24 (2) the Committees on Homeland Security and
25 Governmental Affairs, Commerce, Science, and
26 Transportation, and Appropriations of the Senate.

1 **SEC. 11. DEFINITIONS.**

2 In this Act:

3 (1) **DISASTER RELIEF FUND.**—The term “Dis-
4 aster Relief Fund” means the fund established
5 under section 102(4) of the Robert T. Stafford Dis-
6 aster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42
7 U.S.C. 5122(4)).

8 (2) **FEMA.**—The term “FEMA” means the
9 Federal Emergency Management Agency.

10 (3) **HIGH-RISK AREA.**—The term “high-risk
11 area” means a geographic area identified by the Ad-
12 ministrator, in coordination with NOAA, as having
13 a high frequency or elevated risk of tornado activity.

14 (4) **NOAA.**—The term “NOAA” means the Na-
15 tional Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.