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Summary of FEMA Reform Act of 2025

This brief provides an overview of the *Fixing Emergency Management for Americans Act of 2025*, also known as the *FEMA Reform Act of 2025* ([H.R. 4669](#)). The *FEMA Reform Act of 2025* presents the most robust legislative reform of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and disaster assistance programs in more than a decade. Introduced by Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Sam Graves (R-MO) and Ranking Member Rick Larsen (D-WA) on July 24, 2025, the bill will streamline the federal government's response to natural disasters and ensure that disaster relief efforts are fast and reliable.

Division A – Establishment of FEMA as a Cabinet-Level Independent Agency

Title I – Establishment of Federal Emergency Management Agency

Title I fundamentally restructures FEMA as an independent, Cabinet-level agency reporting directly to the President, establishing its mission to reduce the loss of life and property through comprehensive emergency management. Currently, FEMA is overseen by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The title creates a new leadership structure with a Senate-confirmed Administrator serving as the President's principal advisor on emergency management, supported by a Deputy Administrator and Assistant Administrators, all with specific qualifications in emergency management and executive leadership. Key provisions include delineation of the Administrator's extensive authorities and responsibilities, establishment of an independent Inspector General and detailed transfer of functions from DHS over a one-year transition period. The title concludes with administrative provisions, including personnel protections, legal continuity measures, establishment of a Working Capital Fund for facility operations and creation of a Veterans Advocate position to enhance disaster assistance for veterans.

Title II – Offices and Functions of Federal Emergency Management Agency

Title II makes extensive conforming amendments across federal law to reflect FEMA's transition from a DHS component to an independent agency. This section systematically updates the *Homeland Security Act of 2002* and the *Public Health Service Act*, removing references to FEMA as part of DHS while transferring emergency management functions and authorities directly to the independent FEMA Administrator. These amendments cover critical coordination mechanisms, including Strategic National Stockpile operations, public health emergency preparedness, regional office functions, the National Advisory Council, private sector preparedness programs and specialized response capabilities like nuclear incident response, ensuring that existing emergency management coordination structures continue to function effectively under FEMA's new independent status.

Title III – Related Matters

Title III addresses the administrative and legislative follow-up required to complete FEMA's transition to independence through two key provisions. It mandates that within 120 days, the President must amend relevant homeland security directives and administrative documents to reflect FEMA's new Cabinet-level status and direct reporting relationship. It also requires the FEMA Administrator to consult with Congress and prepare recommended legislation containing additional technical and conforming amendments, to be submitted within 90 days after the transition period ends, acknowledging that the complexity of establishing FEMA as an independent agency may require additional legislative corrections to ensure seamless operations and clear legal authorities.

Division B – FEMA Reforms

Title I – Public Assistance Reforms

Sec. 101. Rebuilding Public Infrastructure (Pages 44-64): Creates a new Section 409 within the *Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act*, establishing an expedited process for repairing, restoring, reconstructing, or replacing disaster-damaged public and private nonprofit facilities. Grants are provided on a per-project basis without regard to prior conditions, based on cost estimates from appropriately licensed professionals. The section includes a presumption of cost estimate accuracy unless criminal fraud is evident, 90-day review timelines, 30-day fund availability requirements and one-time cost adjustment provisions. Federal cost share ranges from 65% to 85% based on state mitigation investments and preparedness measures. The provision sunsets the existing Section 406 procedures by 2032 while allowing states to choose between old and new systems for open disasters.

Sec. 102. Task Force to Address Backlog of Open Declared Disasters (Pages 64-70): Establishes a temporary task force led by the FEMA Administrator to develop processes for eliminating the current backlog of open declared disasters. The task force includes regional administrators and subject matter experts, with duties including identifying barriers to closeout, examining appeals processes and coordinating with existing Agency efforts. Requires briefings to Congress within 180 days, semiannually until 800 disasters are closed and annually thereafter. The section mandates closeout when 90% of costs are validated and includes GAO review provisions.

Sec. 103. Disaster Declaration Damage Thresholds (Pages 70-71): Directs the FEMA Administrator to consider whether impacted counties meet definitions of economically distressed communities or rural areas when making disaster declaration recommendations. For areas meeting these criteria, it requires the authorization of individual assistance when public assistance is authorized. This section also requires revision of Agency policies and guidance to implement these considerations while preserving Presidential discretion.

Sec. 104. Federal Permitting Improvement (Pages 71-84): Rewrites Section 316 of the *Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act* to streamline environmental and historic preservation requirements for disaster recovery projects. Establishes that repair, restoration, reconstruction, or replacement of disaster-damaged facilities to applicable building codes at the same location, including mitigation measures, shall not be considered major federal actions under NEPA. It provides specific expedited procedures, including general stormwater discharge permits on notice of intent submission, emergency permitting under existing U.S. Army Corps of Engineers regulations, and automatic waivers from National Historic Preservation Act and Endangered Species Act requirements for qualifying projects. Creates a

comprehensive state-managed review process, allowing states to assume federal environmental review responsibilities through written agreements executed by governors, subject to federal court jurisdiction and liability provisions. Those state agreements require demonstration of financial resources, personnel capacity, legal authority and public transparency comparable to federal Freedom of Information Act requirements. Establishes mandatory annual audits by the FEMA Inspector General, including public comment periods, 4-year comprehensive reviews, and ongoing monitoring after year four. Includes detailed termination procedures requiring 120-day notice and cure periods for non-compliance, with states retaining authority over locally administered projects and training responsibilities. Agreements are limited to 5-year renewable terms with exclusive federal court jurisdiction over compliance challenges and intervention rights for the Administrator.

Sec. 105. Unified Federal Review (Pages 85-90): Replaces Section 429 of the *Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act* to establish FEMA as the lead agency for coordinated federal environmental and historic reviews of disaster recovery projects. Requires establishment of unified interagency processes within one year, sets public comment periods of 45-60 days and mandates record of decision issuance within 90 days of final environmental impact statements. Emphasizes early agency coordination and issue resolution to prevent delays.

Sec. 106. Block Grants for Small Disasters (Pages 90-96): The goal of this section is to streamline disaster recovery for smaller-scale disaster assistance. It creates a new Title VIII within the *Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act*, authorizing governors and tribal chief executives to request lump-sum payments for small disasters (defined as up to 125% of state per capita damage threshold) as an alternative to traditional Public Assistance programs. Payments equal 80% of estimated federal share with fixed amounts that cannot be adjusted based on actual costs, except for unforeseen circumstances. Establishes a streamlined process requiring states to indicate annual participation interest and specify requests at disaster declaration, with a 90-day mutual agreement deadline or reversion to standard procedures. Mandates pre-approved administrative plans, a 90-day approval timeline and 30-day disbursement. Funds may be used flexibly for disaster recovery, addressing declared incident impacts, provided to eligible entities and compliant with environmental, historic preservation and civil rights laws. Recipients cannot receive traditional Public Assistance for the same disaster but must submit annual expense reports. Includes Inspector General oversight with annual reviews of participation levels, fund usage effectiveness and fraud detection with prosecution referrals.

Sec. 107. Common Sense Debris Removal (Pages 96-97): Streamlines debris removal authorization processes during disaster recovery. Removes the discretionary "public interest" determination requirement from Section 407 of the *Stafford Act* and prohibits additional presidential requirements beyond existing statutory minimums. Directs the Administrator to revise guidance and regulations accordingly and conduct a comprehensive review of debris removal service contracting within one year. Requires development of best practices for contracts that ensure effective removal, appropriate speed and proper cost accountability, addressing concerns that certain payment structures create oversight challenges and increase costs.

Sec. 108. Disaster Management Costs Modernization (Pages 97-100): Allows recipients to use excess management cost funds across all open disasters for capacity building and management activities. Excess funds remain available for five years and can be applied to major disasters, emergencies, preparedness measures and mitigation activities. Applies only to disasters declared and funded after enactment.

Sec. 109. Streamlining and Consolidating Information Collection and Preliminary Damage Assessments

(Pages 100-104): Amends existing law to require interagency study and plan development for streamlining information collection from disaster applicants within 2 years. Establishes a working group to examine preliminary damage assessment duplication and identify emerging technologies like unmanned aircraft systems. Requires a comprehensive report, public availability and implementation within 180 days of report submission.

Sec. 110. Reasonable Incident Periods (Pages 104-107): Requires the Administrator to convene an advisory panel of emergency management personnel to review incident period determination processes within 6 months. The panel includes national organizations, county officials, National Weather Service and regional representatives, with a focus on slow onset, noncontiguous, compound and cascading disasters. Requires interim and final reports with implementation through rulemaking after a 30-day congressional review.

Sec. 111. Fire Management Assistance Program Policy (Page 107): Expands the scope of fire management assistance beyond just mitigation activities. Adds authorization for "assessments and emergency stabilization to protect public safety" as eligible activities under Section 420 of the *Stafford Act*, specifically clarifying that these activities are available regardless of the incident period for a declared fire. This allows for more comprehensive fire response, including immediate safety measures and post-fire stabilization work that may extend beyond the formal incident timeframe, providing greater flexibility in addressing fire-related public safety threats.

Sec. 112. Indian Tribal Government Eligibility (Pages 107-109): Allows tribal governments to directly request fire management assistance declarations rather than requiring state requests. Maintains backup eligibility through state declarations and requires updated regulations within one year, including government-to-government consultation with tribes.

Sec. 113. Strengthening Closeouts for Critical Services (Page 110): Expands closeout procedures to include private nonprofit facilities providing critical services, ensuring consistent treatment with government entities in disaster closeout processes.

Sec. 114. Sheltering of Emergency Response Personnel (Pages 110-112): Authorizes reimbursement to state, tribal and local governments for providing temporary housing to emergency response personnel and their household members when a disaster has damaged or destroyed the responders' own homes and that this housing displacement would disrupt the provision of emergency protective measures. Covers costs for hotels, temporary housing units, or other temporary housing arrangements, when the Governor or chief executive determines the disaster damage is severe enough to impair emergency response operations. These reimbursements are limited to reasonable periods up to 6 months after the disaster period ends, based on factors including extent of damage, availability of alternative housing, utility availability and transportation infrastructure disruptions. Applies to employees and contractors providing law enforcement, fire suppression, rescue, emergency medical, emergency management, or communications services, as well as elected officials (except Members of Congress) directing emergency operations.

Sec. 115. Emergency Protective Measures to Fight Flooding Damage (Pages 112-113): Clarifies reimbursement for stormwater pumping station operators engaged in flood fighting activities based on applicable equipment rates, regardless of whether equipment is temporary or permanently mounted.

Sec. 116. Fairness and Accountability in Appeals (Page 113): Requires the FEMA Administrator to reimburse attorney's fees when the appeals board decides in favor of the applicant or concludes Administrator error in assistance denial.

Sec. 117. Expedited Funding for Emergency Work (Pages 113-114): Mandates 120-day disbursement of emergency work reimbursements once 90% of estimated costs are determined eligible, accelerating payment timelines for emergency protective measures.

Sec. 118. Consistency in Procurement Practices (Page 114): Treats local governments the same as state and tribal governments under federal procurement standards for Stafford Act assistance, ensuring consistent regulatory treatment.

Title II – Individual Assistance Reforms

Sec. 201. Information Sharing for Federal Agencies (Pages 114-126): Establishes a "unified disaster application system" as a web-based interagency platform for disaster assistance administration. Includes comprehensive data security requirements, Privacy Act compliance and waiver authorities during disasters. Allows other federal agencies to use the system under specified agreement terms with liability provisions for unauthorized disclosures.

Sec. 202. Universal Application for Individual Assistance (Pages 126-127): Aims to streamline the disaster assistance application process for individuals by consolidating multiple program applications into a single form. Directs the FEMA Administrator to develop and establish a universal application for direct federal disaster assistance for individuals in areas impacted by emergencies or disasters, eliminating the need for separate applications across different agencies and programs. Requires mandatory consultation with the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Administrator of the Small Business Administration, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development and Secretary of Agriculture, with these entities required to provide prompt support to FEMA during development. The application must include a voluntary demographic survey component to collect applicant demographic data for program analysis and improvement purposes. This provision works in conjunction with the unified disaster application system established in Section 201 to create a more efficient, accessible and coordinated approach to federal disaster assistance delivery for individuals and households.

Sec. 203. Clarifying Duplication of Benefits (Pages 127-128): Restores and amends duplication of benefits waiver authority, removing income thresholds for eligibility and applying to disasters since January 1, 2016. Clarifies that receiving loans is not duplicative assistance and excludes charitable donations from duplication determinations.

Sec. 204. Crisis Counseling and Addiction in Disasters (Pages 128-131): Expands crisis counseling assistance to explicitly include substance use and alcohol use services. Requires application review and congressional reporting on changes. Includes a GAO review of program duration and compliance and adjusts management cost reimbursement rates for individual assistance and crisis counseling programs.

Sec. 205. Repair and Rebuilding (Pages 131-132): Significantly expands eligibility for individual disaster assistance by removing restrictive habitability requirements. Amends Section 408(b)(1) of the *Stafford Act* to make financial assistance available for any homes "damaged by a major disaster" rather than only those "rendered uninhabitable," broadening access to repair funding for households with any level of disaster damage. Creates a new hazard mitigation assistance category under Section 408(c)(5) of the *Stafford Act*

allowing financial assistance for cost-effective measures that reduce threats to life and property or prevent future damage to residences, utilities, or infrastructure. Recipients are not required to demonstrate an inability to obtain assistance through other means except insurance proceeds. Establishes funding caps for hazard mitigation assistance equivalent to the maximum amounts available under other individual assistance categories, ensuring consistent benefit levels across disaster aid programs.

Sec. 206. FEMA Emergency Home Repair Program (Pages 132-134): Authorizes emergency home repair services to enable disaster survivors to safely shelter in place. Adds "minor repairs up to habitability" as an eligible emergency protective measure under Section 403(a)(3)(K) of the *Stafford Act* for owner-occupied homes damaged by disasters, subject to appropriations availability. Defines habitability using HUD's minimum standards for permanent housing, including basic structural integrity, weather protection and essential utilities. Requires federal coordinating officers to identify and communicate all available sheltering and housing options to state governors or designated coordinators within 15 days of major disaster declarations, improving coordination and survivor awareness of assistance programs. Mandates final implementing regulations within 2 years of enactment to establish operational procedures and standards for the repair program.

Sec. 207. Direct Assistance (Pages 134-136): Expands FEMA's authority to provide direct assistance when financial assistance is insufficient or unavailable. Restructures Section 408(c)(2) of the *Stafford Act* to authorize both financial assistance and direct assistance for repairing owner-occupied residences, utilities and residential infrastructure damaged by disasters or rendered inaccessible for individuals with disabilities. Direct assistance is available when applicants cannot effectively use financial assistance and resources are lacking for repairs, including eligible hazard mitigation measures that reduce the likelihood of future damage. Eliminates requirements to demonstrate an inability to obtain assistance through other means except insurance proceeds, simplifying eligibility and reducing bureaucratic barriers.

Sec. 208. Accurate Information to Disaster Victims (Page 136): Prohibits FEMA from issuing assistance denial letters to insured applicants before final insurance claim determinations, preventing premature denials based on pending insurance coverage.

Sec. 209. Improved Notices for FEMA Assistance (Pages 137-138): Extends the assistance period from 18 to 24 months and requires detailed appeal information, including documentation used in determinations, reasons for decisions, recommended remedial steps and inspection documents within 10 days of completion.

Sec. 210. Common Sense Displacement Assistance for Disaster Victims (Page 138): Clarifies that insurance cannot be considered duplication of benefits for displacement assistance. Defines displacement assistance comprehensively to include food, water, first aid, personal hygiene items, baby formula, breastfeeding supplies, transportation fuel, emergency supplies, hotel/motel stays, staying with family/friends and other available housing options.

Sec. 211. State-Managed Housing Authority (Pages 139-141): Revives and modifies a state-managed housing pilot program, removing burdensome requirements and establishing a 75% federal cost share. Extends authority to 10 years and requires transparency in evaluation criteria. Includes GAO assessment upon program expiration.

Sec. 212. Improved Rental Assistance (Page 141): Addresses post-disaster housing market disruptions affecting rental costs. Amends Section 408(c)(1)(A)(ii) of the *Stafford Act* to require consideration of "local

post-disaster rent increases" when determining rental assistance amounts, ensuring assistance levels reflect actual market conditions rather than pre-disaster rates.

Sec. 213. Online Guides for Post-Disaster Assistance (Pages 141-144): Authorizes funding for state agencies to create and maintain websites providing post-disaster recovery information for communities and individuals. Requires cooperation with multiple federal agencies and updates every 6 months.

Sec. 214. Clarifying Sheltering Assistance Eligibility (Pages 144-145): Removes housing barriers for individuals experiencing homelessness or lacking traditional address documentation. Amends both Section 403 and Section 408 of the *Stafford Act* to prohibit disqualification based on absence of fixed physical address for sheltering assistance, provided applicants can demonstrate disaster-area residency through alternative means as determined by the Administrator. Acceptable alternative documentation includes shelter records or affidavits establishing presence in the disaster-affected area at the time of the disaster.

Sec. 215. Access to Lifesaving Non-Congregate Sheltering (Page 145): Removes credit card and security deposit requirements for accessing non-congregate sheltering assistance, eliminating financial barriers to emergency housing.

Sec. 216. Assistance for Total Loss (Pages 146): Authorizes home replacement assistance for complete property loss situations when economically justified. Adds new Section 408(c)(3)(B) to the *Stafford Act* allowing financial assistance for home replacement when total loss occurs and direct assistance costs would exceed replacement costs, reduced by insurance proceeds and subject to duplication of benefits provisions. Includes mandatory congressional reporting requirement when replacement assistance is authorized under the cost-effectiveness standard but not offered, requiring a detailed explanation for the decision not to provide such assistance.

Title III – Mitigation Reforms

Sec. 301. Pre-Approved Project Mitigation Plans (Pages 147-154): Requires states and tribes to develop pre-approved project mitigation plans within 3 years or lose increased federal cost share eligibility. Establishes a peer review process using a 30-member expert panel with 1-year rotating terms. Plans must include projects for each county with detailed descriptions and cost estimates. Approved projects receive automatic approval under existing mitigation programs.

Sec. 302. Reducing Disaster Costs and Protecting Lives (Pages 154-158): Converts the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program under Section 203 of the *Stafford Act* from competitive to formula-based grants, with specific allocations: 40% equal distribution, 20% based on hazard vulnerability, 20% on population and income factors, and 20% for rural/economically distressed areas. Guarantees \$75 million annually for tribal governments. Requires 50% distribution to local governments within 60 days after receiving assistance under the fund.

Sec. 303. Resilient Buildings and Communities (Pages 159-163): Updates building code definitions to include the latest 2 published editions of relevant consensus-based codes, specifications and standards, and establishes a residential resilience pilot program using up to 10% of Section 203 of *Stafford Act* funds annually. The pilot program prioritizes financial need and terminates September 30, 2028, with comprehensive reporting requirements on outcomes and demographics.

Sec. 304. Strengthening Hazard Risk Reduction (Pages 164-166): Eliminates pilot program restrictions on post-disaster mitigation funding combinations and authorizes advance payments for home retrofits including home

elevations. Allows a combination of Section 203 and 404 of *Stafford Act* funding for large projects while maintaining separate cost-share requirements and eligibility criteria.

Sec. 305. Utility Resiliency (Page 167): Permits electric utilities to combine hazard mitigation activities with emergency power restoration work. Clarifies that receiving emergency restoration assistance doesn't disqualify utilities from subsequent hazard mitigation assistance for the same facilities.

Sec. 306. Additional Amendments to Hazard Mitigation Revolving Loan Fund (Pages 167-168): Expands eligible entity definitions to include hazard mitigation and resilience expertise beyond just emergency management. Increases administrative cost allowance from 2% to 4% of capitalization grants.

Sec. 307. Streamlined Hazard Mitigation Application Process (Pages 168-169): Requires the Administrator of FEMA to establish a consolidated grant application form for hazard mitigation funds provided under Sections 203, 205 and 404 of the *Stafford Act* mitigation funding within 180 days of enactment. These adjustments are intended to facilitate faster administration of mitigation funds under these sections of the *Stafford Act*, facilitate the administration of National Flood Insurance Act funds, ensure the provision of hazard mitigation assistance to reduce administrative burdens for FEMA and applicants, and expedite the execution and distribution of grant agreements and funds.

Sec. 308. Study and Report on Mitigation Benefits (Pages 169-172): Mandates a comprehensive study of FEMA mitigation program effectiveness, cost savings and strategic impact. Requires an initial report within 18 months, annual updates thereafter and public availability in a searchable format. Includes quantitative analysis, case studies and stakeholder consultation.

Title IV – Transparency and Accountability (Pages 172 – 207)

Title IV establishes a comprehensive framework for oversight, transparency, and accountability in FEMA's operations and disaster assistance programs. These provisions create multiple layers of review through GAO studies, Inspector General assessments and congressional reporting requirements to ensure effective program performance and fiscal responsibility. The title mandates public transparency through detailed reporting of disaster spending, while requiring systematic analysis of program effectiveness, fraud prevention and coordination challenges. Key accountability mechanisms include prohibition of political discrimination, detailed justification requirements for disaster declarations and comprehensive studies examining disparities in assistance delivery. These provisions collectively aim to enhance public trust, improve program outcomes, and ensure equitable disaster assistance through data-driven oversight and transparent operations. A full list of sections contained within Title IV is below.

- Sec. 401. GAO Review of FEMA Transition
- Sec. 402. Transparency and Online Accountability
- Sec. 403. Prohibition on Political Discrimination
- Sec. 404. Review of Burdensome Regulations and Policies
- Sec. 405. Report on Assistance to Individuals
- Sec. 406. Individual Assistance Dashboard
- Sec. 407. GAO Report on Preliminary Damage Assessments
- Sec. 408. Improved Rental Assistance
- Sec. 409. GAO Assessment on Identity Theft and Disaster Fraud
- Sec. 410. GAO Study on Insurance Utilization for Public Assistance-Eligible Facilities
- Sec. 411. Study on Wildfire Management Plans

- Sec. 412. Effectiveness of Local, State, Territory, and Federal Alerting Systems
- Sec. 413. GAO Review of Management Costs
- Sec. 414. Report on Coordination of Disaster Assistance to Individuals
- Sec. 415. GAO Review of Cost Savings Associated with Repair and Rebuilding Reforms
- Sec. 416. Transparency for Disaster Declarations
- Sec. 417. Fast-Moving Disasters Working Group
- Sec. 418. Public Assistance Dashboard
- Sec. 419. Improving Disaster Workforce Retention

What's Next?

The House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure will likely hold a markup of the legislation after Congress returns from August recess on September 2, although no official markup date has been announced. It is also unclear what role the House Homeland Security Committee's Emergency Management and Technology Subcommittee, which maintains oversight of FEMA, will play in the FEMA reform process. The House T&I Committee's Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management oversees programs addressing the federal management of emergencies and natural disasters, including FEMA and DHS's other disaster management responsibilities while the Homeland Security Committee has jurisdiction over emergency preparedness, response, mitigation, resilience, and recovery; DHS grant programs; and homeland security research and development. The Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs has not released text or held a markup for any companion legislation. Senator Thom Tillis (R-NC) introduced a more limited FEMA reform bill ([S. 1246](#)) on April 2, 2025, though that bill's focus is only on the establishment of FEMA as a Cabinet-level independent agency and conforming amendments.

Additional Resources

The text of the *FEMA Reform Act of 2025* can be found [here](#).

The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's section-by-section summary of the *FEMA Reform Act of 2025* can be found [here](#).