

Calendar No. 264

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 861

To streamline the sharing of information among Federal disaster assistance agencies, to expedite the delivery of life-saving assistance to disaster survivors, to speed the recovery of communities from disasters, to protect the security and privacy of information provided by disaster survivors, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MARCH 5, 2025

Mr. PETERS (for himself, Mr. LANKFORD, Mr. PAUL, Mr. TILLIS, Ms. ERNST, and Mr. BUDD) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

NOVEMBER 7, 2025

Reported by Mr. PAUL, without amendment

A BILL

To streamline the sharing of information among Federal disaster assistance agencies, to expedite the delivery of life-saving assistance to disaster survivors, to speed the recovery of communities from disasters, to protect the security and privacy of information provided by disaster survivors, 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,*

1 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

2 This Act may be cited as the “Disaster Assistance
3 Simplification Act”.

4 **SEC. 2. ESTABLISHMENT OF A UNIFIED DISASTER ASSIST-**
5 **ANCE INTAKE PROCESS AND SYSTEM.**

6 The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emer-
7 gency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5121 et seq.) is amended
8 by adding at the end the following:

9 **“SEC. 707. ESTABLISHMENT OF A UNIFIED DISASTER AS-**
10 **SISTANCE INTAKE PROCESS AND SYSTEM.**

11 “(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

12 “(1) ADMINISTRATOR.—The term ‘Adminis-
13 trator’ means the Administrator of the Federal
14 Emergency Management Agency.

15 “(2) APPLICANT.—The term ‘applicant’
16 means—

17 “(A) an individual, business, or organiza-
18 tion that applies for disaster assistance from a
19 disaster assistance program;

20 “(B) an individual, business, or organiza-
21 tion on behalf of which an individual described
22 in subparagraph (A) applies for disaster assist-
23 ance from a disaster assistance program; and

24 “(C) an individual, business, or organiza-
25 tion that seeks assistance as a beneficiary of a
26 State, local government, or Indian tribal gov-

1 ernment that received assistance under a dis-
2 aster assistance program.

3 “(3) DISASTER ASSISTANCE AGENCY.—The
4 term ‘disaster assistance agency’ means—

5 “(A) the Federal Emergency Management
6 Agency; and

7 “(B) any Federal agency that provides dis-
8 aster assistance to individuals, businesses, orga-
9 nizations, States, local governments, Indian
10 tribal governments, communities, or organiza-
11 tions that the Administrator certifies as a dis-
12 aster assistance agency in accordance with sub-
13 section (f) to carry out the purposes of a dis-
14 aster assistance program.

15 “(4) DISASTER ASSISTANCE INFORMATION.—
16 The term ‘disaster assistance information’ includes
17 any personal, biographical, demographic, geo-
18 graphical, financial, application decision, or other in-
19 formation that a disaster assistance agency, or a re-
20 cipient of a Federal block grant from a disaster as-
21 sistance agency, is authorized to collect, maintain,
22 disclose, or use to—

23 “(A) process an application for disaster as-
24 sistance from a disaster assistance program; or

1 “(B) otherwise carry out the purpose of a
2 disaster assistance program.

3 “(5) DISASTER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.—The
4 term ‘disaster assistance program’ means—

5 “(A) a program that provides disaster as-
6 sistance to individuals and households under
7 title IV or V in accordance with sections 408
8 and 502; or

9 “(B) any other assistance program author-
10 ized by a Federal statute or funded with Fed-
11 eral appropriations under which a disaster as-
12 sistance agency awards or distributes disaster
13 assistance to an individual, household, or orga-
14 nization, or provides a Federal block grant for
15 these purposes, that arises from a major dis-
16 aster or emergency declared under section 401
17 or 501, respectively, including—

18 “(i) disaster assistance;

19 “(ii) long-term disaster recovery as-
20 sistance;

21 “(iii) the post-disaster restoration of
22 infrastructure and housing;

23 “(iv) post-disaster economic revitaliza-
24 tion;

1 “(v) a loan authorized under section
 2 7(b) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C.
 3 636(b)); and

4 “(vi) food benefit allotments under
 5 section 412 of this Act and section 5(h) of
 6 the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7
 7 U.S.C. 2014(h)).

8 “(6) RECORD.—The term ‘record’ has the
 9 meaning given the term in section 552a of title 5,
 10 United States Code.

11 “(b) UNIFIED DISASTER ASSISTANCE INTAKE PROC-
 12 ESS AND SYSTEM.—

13 “(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 360 days
 14 after the date of enactment of the Disaster Assist-
 15 ance Simplification Act, the Administrator shall, in
 16 consultation with appropriate Federal, State, local,
 17 and Indian tribal governments and entities, develop
 18 and establish a unified intake process and system
 19 for applicants for disaster assistance provided by a
 20 disaster assistance agency to—

21 “(A) facilitate a consolidated application
 22 for any form of disaster assistance provided by
 23 a disaster assistance agency when appropriate
 24 to support the nature and purposes of the as-
 25 sistance;

“(B) carry out the purposes of disaster assistance programs swiftly, efficiently, fairly, and in accordance with applicable laws and privacy and data protections; and

“(C) support the detection, prevention, and investigation of waste, fraud, abuse, or discrimination in the administration of disaster assistance programs.

“(2) CAPABILITIES OF THE CONSOLIDATED APPLICATION SYSTEM.—The unified intake process and system established under paragraph (1) shall—

“(A) accept applications for disaster assistance programs;

“(B) allow for applicants to receive status updates on applications for disaster assistance programs;

“(C) allow for applicants to update disaster assistance information throughout the recovery journeys of those applicants;

“(D) allow for the distribution of information on additional recovery resources to disaster survivors that may be available in a disaster-stricken jurisdiction, in coordination with appropriate Federal, State, local, and Tribal partners;

1 “(E) provide disaster survivors with infor-
2 mation and documentation on the applications
3 of those disaster survivors for a disaster assist-
4 ance program;

5 “(F) allow for the distribution of applica-
6 tion data to support faster and more effective
7 distribution of Federal disaster assistance, in-
8 cluding block grant assistance, for disaster re-
9 covery;

10 “(G) allow for disaster assistance agencies
11 to communicate directly with disaster survivors;
12 and

13 “(H) contain other capabilities determined
14 necessary by the heads of disaster assistance
15 agencies.

16 “(3) UPDATES.—Not later than 30 days after
17 the date on which the Administrator receives a re-
18 quest from a disaster assistance agency to update
19 questions in the consolidated application described in
20 paragraph (1) needed to administer the disaster as-
21 sistance programs of the disaster assistance agency,
22 the Administrator shall make those updates.

23 “(c) AUTHORITIES OF ADMINISTRATOR.—The Ad-
24 ministrators may—

1 “(1) collect, maintain, disclose, and use disaster
2 assistance information, including such information
3 received from any disaster assistance agency, with
4 any other disaster assistance agency for purposes of
5 subsection (b)(1); and

6 “(2) subject to subsection (d), authorize the col-
7 lection, maintenance, disclosure, and use of disaster
8 assistance information collected on or after the date
9 of enactment of the Disaster Assistance Simplifica-
10 tion Act by publishing a notice on a public website
11 that—

12 “(A) includes a detailed description of—

13 “(i) the specific disaster assistance in-
14 formation authorized to be collected, main-
15 tained, disclosed, and used;

16 “(ii) why the collection, maintenance,
17 disclosure, or use of the disaster assistance
18 information is necessary to carry out the
19 purpose of a disaster assistance program;

20 “(iii) how the collection, maintenance,
21 disclosure, and use of disaster assistance
22 information incorporates fair information
23 practices; and

24 “(iv) the disaster assistance agencies
25 that will be granted access to the disaster

1 assistance information to carry out the
2 purpose of any disaster assistance pro-
3 gram; and

4 “(B) provides that the submission of an
5 application through a unified disaster applica-
6 tion constitutes prior written consent to disclose
7 disaster assistance information to disaster as-
8 sistance agencies for the purpose of section
9 552a(b) of title 5, United States Code.

10 “(d) COLLECTION AND SHARING OF RECORDS AND
11 INFORMATION.—

12 “(1) EFFECT OF PUBLICATION OF NOTICE ON
13 PUBLIC WEBSITE.—The publication of a notice by
14 the Administrator on a public website of a revision
15 to the system of records of the unified intake process
16 and system established under subsection (b)(1) prior
17 to any new collection, maintenance, disclosure, or
18 use of records to carry out the purposes of a disaster
19 assistance program with respect to a major disaster
20 or emergency declared by the President under sec-
21 tion 401 or 501, respectively, of this Act shall be
22 deemed to satisfy the notice and publication require-
23 ments of section 552a(e)(4) of title 5, United States
24 Code, for the entire period of performance for any

1 assistance provided under a disaster assistance pro-
2 gram.

3 “(2) PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT WAIVER.—

4 “(A) IN GENERAL.—Upon the declaration
5 of a major disaster or emergency pursuant to
6 section 401 or 501, respectively, of this Act, the
7 Administrator may waive the requirements of
8 subchapter I of chapter 35 of title 44, United
9 States Code (commonly known as the ‘Paper-
10 work Reduction Act’), with respect to the vol-
11 untary collection of information specific to the
12 declared major disaster or emergency needed to
13 carry out the purposes of a disaster assistance
14 program.

15 “(B) DURATION.—A waiver described in
16 subparagraph (A) shall be in effect for the en-
17 tire period of performance for any assistance
18 provided under a disaster assistance program
19 with respect to a declared major disaster or
20 emergency.

21 “(C) TRANSPARENCY.—If the Adminis-
22 trator waives the requirements described in sub-
23 paragraph (A), the Administrator shall—

24 “(i) promptly post on a public
25 website—

1 “(I) a brief justification for the
2 waiver; and

3 “(II) the agencies and offices to
4 which the waiver shall apply;

5 “(ii) update the information posted
6 under clause (i), as applicable; and

7 “(iii) comply with the requirements of
8 subchapter I of chapter 35 of title 44,
9 United States Code (commonly known as
10 the ‘Paperwork Reduction Act’) upon the
11 expiration of the period of performance of
12 any assistance provided under a disaster
13 assistance program if the collection of in-
14 formation may be utilized for the purposes
15 of supporting the disaster assistance pro-
16 gram in future major disaster or emer-
17 gency declarations.

18 “(D) EFFECTIVENESS OF WAIVER.—Any
19 waiver under subparagraph (A) shall take effect
20 on the date on which the Administrator posts
21 information on the internet website as provided
22 for under subparagraph (C).

23 “(e) DATA SECURITY.—The Administrator shall fa-
24 cilitate the collection of disaster assistance information
25 into a unified application only after—

1 “(1) the Administrator certifies that the unified
2 application substantially complies with the data se-
3 curity standards established pursuant to subchapter
4 II of chapter 35 of title 44, United States Code, and
5 any other applicable Federal information security
6 policy;

7 “(2) the Secretary of Homeland Security pub-
8 lishes a privacy impact assessment for the unified
9 application that is similar to the privacy assessment
10 conducted under section 208(b)(1)(B) of the E-Gov-
11 ernment Act of 2002 (44 U.S.C. 3501 note); and

12 “(3) the Administrator, in consultation with
13 disaster assistance agencies, publishes standard
14 rules of behavior for disaster assistance agencies and
15 personnel granted access to disaster assistance infor-
16 mation to protect such information from improper
17 disclosure.

18 “(f) CERTIFICATION OF DISASTER ASSISTANCE
19 AGENCIES.—

20 “(1) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator may
21 certify a Federal agency as a disaster assistance
22 agency after posting an agreement between the Ad-
23 ministrator and the Federal agency on a public
24 website that contains the detailed terms of the
25 agreement.

1 “(2) CONTENTS OF AGREEMENT.—An agree-
2 ment between the Administrator and a Federal
3 agency described in paragraph (1) shall state that
4 the Federal Emergency Management Agency and
5 the Federal agency will—

6 “(A) collect, disclose, maintain, and use
7 disaster assistance information in accordance
8 with—

9 “(i) this section; and

10 “(ii) subject to subsection (i)(2), any
11 existing policies of the Federal Emergency
12 Management Agency and the Federal
13 agency for information protection and use;

14 “(B) train any personnel granted access to
15 disaster assistance information on the rules of
16 behavior established by the Administrator under
17 subsection (e)(3);

18 “(C) in the event of any unauthorized dis-
19 closure of disaster assistance information—

20 “(i) not later than 24 hours after dis-
21 covering the unauthorized disclosure—

22 “(I) in the case of an unauthor-
23 ized disclosure by the Federal agency,
24 notify the Administrator of the disclo-
25 sure; and

1 “(II) in the case of an unauthor-
2 ized disclosure by the Federal Emer-
3 gency Management Agency, notify dis-
4 aster assistance agencies of the disclo-
5 sure;

6 “(ii) cooperate fully with the Adminis-
7 trator and disaster assistance agencies in
8 the investigation and remediation of the
9 disclosure; and

10 “(iii) cooperate fully in the prosecu-
11 tion of a person responsible for the disclo-
12 sure; and

13 “(D) assume responsibility for any com-
14 pensation, civil liability, or other remediation
15 measure awarded by a judgment of a court or
16 agreed upon as a compromise of any potential
17 claim by or on behalf of an applicant, including
18 by obtaining credit monitoring and remediation
19 services, for an improper disclosure of disaster
20 assistance information that is—

21 “(i) caused, directly or indirectly, by
22 the acts or omissions of an officer, em-
23 ployee, or contractor of the Federal agen-
24 cy; or

1 “(ii) from any electronic system of
2 records that was created or maintained by
3 the Federal agency pursuant to section
4 552a(e) of title 5, United States Code.

5 “(g) REPORTS.—

6 “(1) FEMA.—Not later than 1 year after the
7 date of enactment of this section, and every year
8 thereafter for 2 years, the Administrator, in coordi-
9 nation with the heads of disaster assistance agen-
10 cies, shall submit to Congress a report on the imple-
11 mentation of this section, including—

12 “(A) how disaster assistance agencies are
13 working together to implement the require-
14 ments under this section;

15 “(B) the effect of this section on disaster
16 survivor burden and the speed and efficiency of
17 delivering disaster assistance; and

18 “(C) a description of any other challenges
19 that require further legislative action.

20 “(2) GAO.—Not later than 3 years after the
21 date of enactment of this section, the Comptroller
22 General of the United States shall submit to Con-
23 gress a report on how the implementation of this
24 section has affected the disaster survivor experience,

1 and any recommendations for improvements to the
2 requirements under this section.

3 “(h) BRIEFINGS.—Not later than 90 days after the
4 date of enactment of this section, and again not later than
5 180 days after the date of enactment of this section, the
6 Administrator shall brief Congress on—

7 “(1) the status of the implementation of the re-
8 quirements under this section; and

9 “(2) how disaster assistance agencies are work-
10 ing together to implement the requirements under
11 this section.

12 “(i) RULES OF CONSTRUCTION.—

13 “(1) INAPPLICABILITY OF MATCHING PROGRAM
14 PROVISIONS.—The disclosure and use of disaster as-
15 sistance information subject to the requirements of
16 section 552a of title 5, United States Code, among
17 disaster assistance agencies or with State, local, or
18 Tribal governments carrying out disaster assistance
19 programs shall not—

20 “(A) be construed as a matching program
21 for the purpose of section 552a(a)(8) of title 5,
22 United States Code; or

23 “(B) be subject to subsection (e)(12), (o),
24 (p)(1)(A)(ii), (q), (r), or (u) of section 552a of
25 title 5, United States Code.

1 “(2) AUTHORITIES IN OTHER LAWS.—Nothing
2 in this section shall be construed to affect the au-
3 thority of an entity to share disaster assistance in-
4 formation regarding programs funded or facilitated
5 by the entity in accordance with any other law or
6 agency policy.

7 “(3) APPLYING TO MULTIPLE PROGRAMS.—
8 Nothing in this section shall be construed to require
9 an applicant to apply to more than 1 disaster assist-
10 ance program.

11 “(4) PROGRAM AUTHORIZATION.—Nothing in
12 this section shall be construed to authorize a pro-
13 gram that is not authorized by law as of the date
14 of enactment of this section.”.

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A BILL

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