

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, and Mr. TILLIS) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

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,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Disaster Assistance
5 Simplification Act”.

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

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

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

8 “(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

9 “(1) ADMINISTRATOR.—The term ‘Adminis-
 10 trator’ means the Administrator of the Federal
 11 Emergency Management Agency.

12 “(2) APPLICANT.—The term ‘applicant’
 13 means—

14 “(A) an individual, business, or organiza-
 15 tion that applies for disaster assistance from a
 16 disaster assistance program;

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

21 “(C) an individual, business, or organiza-
 22 tion that seeks assistance as a beneficiary of a
 23 State, local government, or Indian tribal gov-
 24 ernment that received assistance under a dis-
 25 aster assistance program.

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

3 “(A) the Federal Emergency Management
4 Agency; and

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

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

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

23 “(B) otherwise carry out the purpose of a
24 disaster assistance program.

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

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

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

16 “(i) disaster assistance;

17 “(ii) long-term disaster recovery as-
18 sistance;

19 “(iii) the post-disaster restoration of
20 infrastructure and housing;

21 “(iv) post-disaster economic revitaliza-
22 tion;

23 “(v) a loan authorized under section
24 7(b) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C.
25 636(b)); and

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

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

8 “(b) UNIFIED DISASTER ASSISTANCE INTAKE PROC-
9 ESS AND SYSTEM.—

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

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

23 “(B) carry out the purposes of disaster as-
24 sistance programs swiftly, efficiently, fairly, and

1 in accordance with applicable laws and privacy
2 and data protections; and

3 “(C) support the detection, prevention, and
4 investigation of waste, fraud, abuse, or discrimi-
5 nation in the administration of disaster assist-
6 ance programs.

7 “(2) CAPABILITIES OF THE CONSOLIDATED AP-
8 PPLICATION SYSTEM.—The unified intake process and
9 system established under paragraph (1) shall—

10 “(A) accept applications for disaster assist-
11 ance programs;

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

15 “(C) allow for applicants to update dis-
16 aster assistance information throughout the re-
17 covery journeys of those applicants;

18 “(D) allow for the distribution of informa-
19 tion on additional recovery resources to disaster
20 survivors that may be available in a disaster-
21 stricken jurisdiction, in coordination with ap-
22 propriate Federal, State, local, and Tribal part-
23 ners;

24 “(E) provide disaster survivors with infor-
25 mation and documentation on the applications

1 of those disaster survivors for a disaster assist-
2 ance program;

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

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

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

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

21 “(c) AUTHORITIES OF ADMINISTRATOR.—The Ad-
22 ministrator may—

23 “(1) collect, maintain, disclose, and use disaster
24 assistance information, including such information
25 received from any disaster assistance agency, with

1 any other disaster assistance agency for purposes of
2 subsection (b)(1); and

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

9 “(A) includes a detailed description of—

10 “(i) the specific disaster assistance in-
11 formation authorized to be collected, main-
12 tained, disclosed, and used;

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

17 “(iii) how the collection, maintenance,
18 disclosure, and use of disaster assistance
19 information incorporates fair information
20 practices; and

21 “(iv) the disaster assistance agencies
22 that will be granted access to the disaster
23 assistance information to carry out the
24 purpose of any disaster assistance pro-
25 gram; and

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

7 “(d) COLLECTION AND SHARING OF RECORDS AND
8 INFORMATION.—

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

24 “(2) PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT WAIVER.—

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

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

18 “(C) TRANSPARENCY.—If the Adminis-
19 trator waives the requirements described in sub-
20 paragraph (A), the Administrator shall—

21 “(i) promptly post on a public
22 website—

23 “(I) a brief justification for the
24 waiver; and

1 “(II) the agencies and offices to
2 which the waiver shall apply;

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

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

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

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

24 “(1) the Administrator certifies that the unified
25 application substantially complies with the data se-

1 security standards established pursuant to subchapter
2 II of chapter 35 of title 44, United States Code, and
3 any other applicable Federal information security
4 policy;

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

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

16 “(f) CERTIFICATION OF DISASTER ASSISTANCE
17 AGENCIES.—

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

24 “(2) CONTENTS OF AGREEMENT.—An agree-
25 ment between the Administrator and a Federal

1 agency described in paragraph (1) shall state that
2 the Federal Emergency Management Agency and
3 the Federal agency will—

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

7 “(i) this section; and

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

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

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

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

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

24 “(II) in the case of an unauthor-
25 ized disclosure by the Federal Emer-

1 gency Management Agency, notify dis-
2 aster assistance agencies of the disclo-
3 sure;

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

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

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

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

23 “(ii) from any electronic system of
24 records that was created or maintained by

1 the Federal agency pursuant to section
2 552a(e) of title 5, United States Code.

3 “(g) REPORTS.—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

10 “(i) RULES OF CONSTRUCTION.—

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

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

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

24 “(2) AUTHORITIES IN OTHER LAWS.—Nothing
 25 in this section shall be construed to affect the au-

1 thority of an entity to share disaster assistance in-
2 formation regarding programs funded or facilitated
3 by the entity in accordance with any other law or
4 agency policy.

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

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

○