



Wes Moore | Governor
Aruna Miller | Lt. Governor
Russell J. Strickland | Secretary

FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS - HB0789
Public Safety - State Disaster Recovery Fund

Maryland Department of Emergency Management
Appropriations Committee
Hearing Date: 9 MAR 2023

Chairman Ben Barnes
Appropriations Committee
Room 121
House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Chairman Barnes,

The Maryland Department of Emergency Management (MDEM) writes **in support with amendments of HB0789 - State Disaster Recovery Fund**. The bill establishes a disaster recovery fund to be administered by the Department, and it will fill a critical gap in Maryland's disaster recovery capabilities. The bill will also enable MDEM to establish much-needed minimum reporting criteria to gather disaster-related impact data, which will not only support ongoing disaster relief and recovery efforts, but will also support decision makers in areas of disaster risk reduction like hazard mitigation. This bill directly reflects the recommendations of a comprehensive [State Disaster Relief Fund Working Group](#), which met over the course of several months in 2022 and studied various models for non-federal disaster assistance programs, as well as heard from recent disaster survivors.

The only mechanism in State law which currently addresses disaster recovery funding is the Catastrophic Event Account. The CEA is not an effective or efficient mechanism to support disaster relief and recovery operations in the absence of a federal disaster declaration. There are limited State and local relief programs for communities impacted by disasters, particularly for individuals who are under- or uninsured. The existing programs could be potentially, inequitably applied and are largely loan-based, which place low- and moderate-income residents further behind after a disaster.

This legislation has the potential to fill significant gaps in disaster relief and recovery capabilities at the State and local levels. Numerous studies demonstrate that disasters most frequently and most significantly impact low- and moderate-income families, and disproportionately impact Black, Brown and Indigenous communities, women, and children. Individuals experiencing compounding disasters see their advantages or disadvantages compound as well. For example, [a recent study found](#) that households not protected by flood insurance prior to Hurricane Harvey were provided less support by federal disaster relief programs regardless of financial situation than those with flood insurance. The study also found individuals had exhausted all financial resources, including using retirement savings, and many still were living in homes without completed repairs. **Simply put: our current disaster relief policy leaves many of our neighbors behind.**

While the Federal Stafford Act does potentially provide assistance to individuals through FEMA's Individual Assistance program, it is worth noting that historically an Individual Assistance declaration is extremely difficult to obtain. In the past 20 years, Maryland has only received three IA declarations: Tropical Storm Isabel, Hurricane Sandy, and COVID-19.¹

MDEM believes this Fund will support a system that will give better access to disaster relief programs by providing the flexibility to meet community needs who are typically underserved by federal assistance, and who may have little-to-no support in non-federally declared disasters. **When combined with a risk reduction strategy that invests in hazard mitigation for our communities, HB0789 will significantly increase Maryland's resilience in the face of local disasters.**

MDEM participated as a member of the State Disaster Relief Fund Working Group as well as provided staffing to support the effort. The Working Group included a geographically diverse representation from county governments as well as the Maryland Municipal League, the Department of Human Services, and the Maryland Emergency Management Association. The Working Group took into consideration

¹ The COVID-19 Individual Assistance declaration was a unique case and did not include access to the Individuals and Households Program, the program which most traditionally provides direct assistance after disasters.



Wes Moore | Governor
Aruna Miller | Lt. Governor
Russell J. Strickland | Secretary

the many times local emergency management offices have struggled to assist residents when a federal disaster declaration was not available. The full report can be read [here](#).

We would like to recognize and thank Delegate Dana Jones for being engaged on this critical topic and working closely with the emergency management community to identify a solution to the current policy gap. MDEM has been in touch with the Sponsor and supports the proposed amendments to the bill.

In conclusion, MDEM urges a favorable report with the proposed Sponsor amendments to HB0789 - State Disaster Recovery Fund.

If you have any questions, please contact Anna Sierra, MDEM legislative liaison: anna.sierra1@maryland.gov.