



COUNTY EMERGENCY MANAGERS AFFILIATE

LETTER IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 650 AS AMENDED
PUBLIC SAFETY – STATE DISASTER RECOVERY FUND BILL
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

MARCH 27, 2023

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) Emergency Managers (EM) Affiliate **SUPPORTS** the amended version of SB 650 – Public Safety – State Disaster Recovery Fund Bill and urges the committee to forgo the amendments made to HB 789 - Catastrophic Event Account - Unit of Local Government - Authorized Fund.

Over the course of five months in 2022, the State Disaster Relief Fund (SDRF) Workgroup met to study and make recommendations regarding the efficacy and efficiency of the State’s disaster relief funding capability. The Workgroup evaluated national best practices, analyzed lessons learned from state agencies and subject matter experts, and listened to the lived experiences of recent disaster survivor residents of the City of Annapolis and Anne Arundel County. A concerted effort was made to ensure that when making recommendations to inform bill drafting, the priorities identified by the Workgroup would be reflected. Accordingly, the amended SB 650 incorporates these recommendations, and as a result, reflects the vision of the bill that the EM Affiliates support.

The differences between the Senate bill and the amended House bill are cause for concern. The amended version of HB 789 does not fill any of the gaps identified by the SDRF Workgroup, such as: creating a unified state approach to disaster relief; identifying any policy, thresholds, or access procedures for requesting or granting funding from the Catastrophic Event Account (CEA) for relief efforts by either State agencies or local governments; providing quick access to funding for existing state disaster relief programs to be available to Marylanders in the wake of a disaster; identifying critical data collection requirements to enable State and local governments to quantify non-federal disaster impacts; or providing a mechanism for direct assistance to individuals suffering from the impacts of disasters.

Additionally, as it is written, the amended version of the House bill will put the onus on local governments to establish, implement, and maintain a local disaster recovery program rather than be able to leverage a coordinated, statewide effort. Furthermore, whereas the original version of HB 789 would establish a state-managed fund with policies and procedures to manage and disburse the fund equitably, in the amended version, local governments will have to bear this burden – in addition to their own recovery efforts – without any specified support from the State.

The amended House bill will create inequities in how Marylanders across the State recover from disasters by perpetuating divisions and inconsistencies across State disaster relief programs, resulting in slow response times and limited assistance for those who are most in need and least able to absorb the impacts of disasters.

Notably, the SDRF that would be established through SB 650, as amended, provides Maryland Department of Emergency Management (MDEM) the ability to coordinate a statewide disaster recovery effort, addressing individual, business, and local government needs when the jurisdictions are themselves overwhelmed. However, the Catastrophic Event Account (CEA) is not managed or directed by MDEM or any other State agency. Only the Governor has the power to transfer funds from the CEA to existing State programs, or under the amended House version, to local units of government. This requires a budget transfer process and a 15-day review by the Legislative Policy Committee. Moreover, using the CEA out of sequence from federal disaster funding requirements could limit eligibility for disaster assistance for Marylanders and local governments. The SDRF is the most efficient and effective mechanism to put in place to ensure that the need for robust disaster relief and recovery operations in Maryland is met.

For the foregoing reasons, MACo Emergency Managers Affiliate unanimously supports the Senate version of the bill and respectfully urge the committee to **SUPPORT SB 650**, as amended.

Respectfully,

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