

Date of Hearing: April 7, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Rhodesia Ransom, Chair

AB 239 (Harabedian) – As Amended March 27, 2025

SUBJECT: State-led County of Los Angeles disaster housing task force

SUMMARY: Establishes the State-Led County of Los Angeles Disaster Housing Task Force. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) and the Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) to jointly convene a state-led County of Los Angeles disaster housing task force for the purpose of coordinating and streamlining efforts between HCD, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Cal OES, and local governments to rebuild housing in communities impacted by the wildfire.
- 2) Requires the housing task force to include representatives of all of the following: HCD, FEMA, Cal OES, the City of Los Angeles, the County of Los Angeles, and local governments.
- 3) Requires the task force to appoint a state disaster housing coordinator to accelerate the delivery of resources, including, but not limited to, funding and technical assistance, to communities impacted by the wildfire.
- 4) Requires the task force to create a central rebuilding database, and publish it on HCD's website.
- 5) Requires the central rebuilding database to include all of the following:
 - (a) Any urgency ordinances adopted in response to the Palisades and Eaton fires, in addition to any prior wildfires;
 - (b) Temporary housing information published by local governments in response to these and other wildfires; and
 - (c) Resources on any other rebuilding best practice.
- 6) Requires the task force, on April 1, 2026, and every quarter thereafter, to report to the Legislature on the status of rebuilding housing in communities impacted by the wildfire.
- 7) Sunset the task force's reporting requirement on April 1, 2030.
- 8) Defines "wildfire" as the wildfires that began on January 7, 2025, in the County of Los Angeles.
- 9) Declares that a special statute is necessary because of the unique need to coordinate and streamline efforts to rebuild housing in communities in the Counties of Los Angeles and Ventura impacted by the wildfires that began on January 7, 2025, in the County of Los Angeles.

- 10) Includes an urgency clause due to the immediate need to coordinate and streamline efforts to rebuild housing in communities in the Counties of Los Angeles and Ventura impacted by the wildfires that began on January 7, 2025, in the County of Los Angeles.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Under the California Emergency Services Act, establishes the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) within the office of the Governor for the purpose of mitigating the effects of natural, manmade, or war-caused emergencies. (Government Code Section 8550)
- 2) Under the California Emergency Services Act, provides Cal OES to be responsible for the state's emergency and disaster response services for natural, technological, or man-made disasters and emergencies, including responsibility for activities necessary to prevent, respond to, recover from, and mitigate the effects of emergencies and disasters to people and property. (Government Code Section 8585)
- 2) Under the California Disaster Assistance Act, requires the Director of Cal OES to provide financial assistance to local agencies for their personnel costs, equipment costs, and the cost of supplies and materials used during disaster response activities, incurred as a result of a state of emergency proclaimed by the Governor, subject to specified criteria. (Government Code Section 8680)
- 3) Provides the California Disaster Assistance Act continuously appropriates moneys in the Disaster Assistance Fund and its subsidiary account, the Earthquake Emergency Investigations Account, without regard to fiscal year. (Government Code Section 8690.25)
- 4) Under the Federal Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, authorizes the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to provide emergency assistance to states and local entities impacted by disasters. In any emergency, the President may, among other things, authorize public assistance programs aimed at providing essential emergency assistance, repairing and restoring damaged public facilities and removing debris. (Public Law 100707)
- 5) Under the Sandy Recovery Improvement Act of 2013, requires FEMA, in cooperation with State, local, and Tribal emergency management agencies, to review, update, and revise through rulemaking the factors that FEMA uses to determine whether to recommend provision of Individual Assistance (IA) during a major disaster. (Public Law 113-2, Section 1109).
- 6) Under Title I of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, authorizes the Community Development Block Grant - Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR). (Subsequent Public Laws are the appropriation acts that provide funding for each disaster. In addition to any requirements cited in the appropriation acts, the CDBG regulations in 24 CFR 570 apply to CDBG-DR funds.)

FISCAL EFFECT: This bill has not been analyzed by a fiscal committee.

COMMENTS:

Purpose of the bill: According to the author, “The devastating Los Angeles fires have left thousands without homes or businesses, turning entire communities to ashes. The long and complex rebuilding process must be accelerated to provide relief to those whose lives have been shattered. AB 239 establishes a state-led disaster housing task force to coordinate recovery efforts, cutting through red tape to ensure homes are rebuilt swiftly and resiliently. This vital legislation will not only restore neighborhoods but also bring hope and stability to those facing unimaginable loss.”

Equity impact: According to the author’s staff, “The equity impacts of this legislation are particularly significant for communities like Altadena, where many homes recently burned down due to the Eaton fire. Altadena has historically been a place where Black and Brown families could build wealth through homeownership, as it avoided redlining, a discriminatory practice that denied financial services to non-white communities. However, the recent wildfire has devastated the area, destroying homes and disrupting the financial stability of residents. This disaster highlights the urgent need for targeted support to address housing recovery and economic stability. This bill promotes equity by ensuring that resources and assistance are directed toward rebuilding efforts in wildfire-affected areas like Altadena.”

January 2025 Firestorms in Los Angeles: On January 7, 2025, as a result of consistent forecasts for dangerous fire weather conditions, the Los Angeles Fire Department pre-deploys and pre-positions resources, including fire engines, command teams, brush patrols, water tenders and air operations personnel at 8:00am. Thirty minutes later, a hiker near the source of the Palisades Fire reports smelling smoke. At 10:20am, an AlertCalifornia wildfire detection camera, detects smoke rising. CAL FIRE reports the Palisades Fire has started southeast of Palisades Drive in the Pacific Palisades at 10:30am. The Palisades Fire erupts, growing from 10 to 200 acres within a half hour and prompting evacuation warnings and orders.

Governor Gavin Newsom proclaimed a State of Emergency in Los Angeles and Ventura Counties due to fire and windstorm conditions. The Palisades Fire has grown to 1,200 acres at the time of his declaration.¹ By 2:30pm, the Palisades Fire has spread to 700 acres and is making a run towards the Pacific Coast Highway. According to the Los Angeles Fire Department, 10,000 houses are threatened and there are 250 city firefighters on scene in addition to 100 Los Angeles County Fire Department Firefighters deployed to assist. Extreme fire behavior, including short and long-range spotting, continues to challenge firefighting efforts for the Palisades Fire. CAL FIRE Incident Management Team II is activated to assist Los Angeles County Fire and Los Angeles City Fire Departments as winds gust up to 60 mph and the fire grows to 1,262 acres by 4:00pm.²

At 6:18pm, CAL FIRE reports the Eaton Fire has begun in Altadena, describing the incident as a "fast-moving fire burning brush fueled by high winds," prompting evacuation orders.³ Given the

¹ <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2025/01/07/governor-newsom-proclaims-state-of-emergency-meets-with-first-responders-in-pacific-palisades-amid-dangerous-fire-weather/>

² <https://www.fire.ca.gov/incidents/2025/1/7/palisades-fire/updates/b5ee529b-be05-4c4a-8892-5463128f2c1d>

³ <https://www.fire.ca.gov/incidents/2025/1/7/eaton-fire/updates/35f4cb4c-4023-4484-a7b2-d0c2a40a5880>

dire conditions of simultaneous conflagrations, the Los Angeles Fire Department calls on all of its firefighters to report for duty and the LA County Fire Department's incident commander orders 10 strike teams (50 engines) to help contain the Eaton Fire.

Palisades and Eaton Fires: At its height, the fires placed an estimated 331,335 people on an evacuation advisory, with nearly 192,000 residents facing mandatory evacuation and roughly 140,000 subject to warnings. The blazes burned a combined 37,469 acres and leveled entire communities in the Pacific Palisades and Altadena neighborhoods of LA County.

The Eaton Fire became the second most destructive fire in California history after destroying 9,418 buildings. The Palisades Fire is the third most destructive fire in state history with 6,837 structures destroyed. As firefighters were battling the largest conflagrations, additional fires broke out in the Los Angeles area. Crews were able to stop the forward spread and contain the blazes. These fires included the Lidia, Archer, Woodley, Sunset, Kenneth, Hurst and Auto fires, which burned close to 2,400 acres between them.

Two weeks after the initial fires, the Hughes Fire began near Castaic Lake in northern Los Angeles County on January 22 and quickly grew to over 10,000 acres. It was fully contained on January 30 after covering 10,425 acres.

After the wildfires were fully contained, LA City inspectors assessed more than 15,000 structures in the Palisades. Once these inspections were completed, the focus shifted to ensuring hazardous debris is safely removed. This process is currently underway with the help of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Army Corps of Engineers.

Major Presidential Disaster Declaration: On January 8, 2025, President Biden approves a Major Disaster Declaration for California, which makes federal disaster assistance to supplement recovery efforts in the areas affected by wildfires and straight-line winds from Jan. 7, 2025 through January 31, 2025.

The President's action makes federal funding available to affected individuals in Los Angeles County. Assistance can include grants for temporary housing and home repairs, low-cost loans to cover uninsured property losses and other programs to help individuals and business owners recover from the effects of the disaster. Federal funding is also available to state, tribal and eligible local governments and certain private nonprofit organizations on a cost-sharing basis for debris removal and emergency protective measures, including direct federal assistance.

Disasters and Housing: Disasters compound existing housing market challenges. Constrained housing supply has led to increased housing cost burdens, especially among populations vulnerable to disaster. A myriad of recovery assistance programs and timelines, and restrictions on what disasters qualify for support coalesce with these steady state challenges to slow community housing recovery efforts.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is responsible for interim housing recovery efforts, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is responsible for those long-term recovery efforts that may extend over several years. At the state level, housing development agencies are working to address housing challenges as a normal course of action.

Disaster response and recovery: Cal OES serves as the state's leadership hub during all major emergencies and disasters. This includes responding, directing, and coordinating local, state and federal resources and mutual aid assets across all regions to support the diverse communities across the state. Cal OES also is responsible for developing and maintaining the State Emergency Plan (SEP) and the Disaster Recovery Framework. Cal OES serves as the state's overall coordinator and agent to secure federal government resources through the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The California Department of Housing and Community Development also plays a critical role in the longer-term recovery process as they manage the US Department Housing and Urban Development's Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program, which are primarily intended to assist housing recovery and to benefit low and moderate income households impacted by disasters.

State Emergency Plan: The SEP describes how response to natural or human- caused emergencies occurs in California. The plan is a requirement of the California Emergency Services Act (ESA), and describes methods for conducting emergency operations, the process for rendering mutual aid, emergency services of government agencies, how resources are mobilized, how the public is informed, and how continuity of government is maintained during emergency. The SEP further describes hazard mitigation, as well as preparedness and recovery from disasters. The SEP defines Emergency Support Functions (ESF) which are discipline- specific groups that develop functional annexes to set goals, objectives, operational concepts, capabilities, organization structures, and related policies and procedures. Under the SEP, there are 18 ESFs led by a state agency and represent an alliance of state government and other stakeholders with similar functional responsibilities:

CA EMERGENCY SUPPORT FUNCTIONS	LEAD STATE AGENCY
CA-ESF 1 Transportation	CA Transportation Agency
CA-ESF 2 Communication	Governor's Office of Emergency Services
CA-ESF 3 Construction and Engineering	Government Operations Agency
CA-ESF 4 Fire and Rescue	Governor's Office of Emergency Services
CA-ESF 5 Management	Governor's Office of Emergency Services
CA-ESF 6 Care and Shelter	CA Health and Human Services Agency
CA-ESF 7 Resources	Government Operations Agency
CA-ESF 8 Public Health and Medical	CA Health and Human Services Agency
CA-ESF 9 Search and Rescue	Merged with ESF 13 Law and ESF 4 Fire.
CA-ESF 10 Hazardous Materials	CA Environmental Protection Agency
CA-ESF 11 Food and Agriculture	CA Department of Food and Agriculture
CA-ESF 12 Utilities	CA Natural Resources Agency
CA-ESF 13 Law Enforcement	Governor's Office of Emergency Services
CA-ESF 14 Recovery	Governor's Office of Emergency Services
CA-ESF 15 Public Information	Governor's Office of Emergency Services
CA-ESF 16 Evacuation	Merged with CA-ESF 13/Law Enforcement
CA-ESF 17 Volunteer/Donations Mgmt.	California Volunteers
CA-ESF 18 Cybersecurity	Governor's Office of Emergency Services

Disaster Recovery: In late 2019, Cal OES finalized the California Disaster Recovery Framework (CDRF) and accompanying Recovery Support Function (RSF) Annexes for long-term recovery. Similar to the organization of the ESFs, the RSFs are led by a state coordinating agency, and in conjunction with the federal government, serve to coordinate recovery-specific resources and guidance to local and tribal communities impacted by disasters.

Federal guidance on recovery planning: Recent federal guidance from FEMA, recommend States and local jurisdictions prioritize three areas in disaster recovery planning: (1) disaster housing planning; (2) state disaster recovery coordinator; and (3) disaster financial management policies and procedures.

Disaster Housing Planning: FEMA recommends the establishment of a State-Led Disaster Housing Task Force (SLDHTF) based on lessons learned from recent disasters to develop a disaster housing plan as part of the SEP or as a standalone document and update this plan at least once every two years. FEMA suggests SLDHTFs lead and coordinate state, local, private sector, and community-based actions to assess housing impacts, identify appropriate post-disaster housing options, and establish processes for expediting post-disaster housing delivery.

SLDHTF plans should clearly identify the roles, responsibilities, composition, and mobilization procedures for the SLDHTF, and how the SLDHTF integrates into the incident command structure. To have a successful SLDHTF plan, FEMA encourages recipients to complete a state housing strategy template and establish a State Disaster Recovery Coordinator.

State Disaster Recovery Coordinator: FEMA provides a Pre-Disaster Recovery Planning Guide to help states prepare for recovery by developing pre-disaster recovery plans that follow a process to engage members of the whole community, develop recovery capabilities, and create an organizational framework for recovery efforts. It is strongly recommended that states establish a State Disaster Recovery Coordinator (SDRC), as an effective pre-disaster recovery plan and process is crucial to help recipients prepare for major disaster incidents, recover effectively, and enable state leadership to better organize and identify gaps in the state's recovery capabilities.

Arguments in support: The Glendora Chamber of Commerce writes in support, "We are writing to express our strong support for your bill AB 239. The bill brings together key agencies, departments and stakeholders to assist impacted communities. It will help identify and address bottlenecks that impede rebuilding efforts. It is critical that we rebuild quickly to ensure that residents are not driven out of their communities due to delays in construction. This has been a significant issue in other communities affected by wildfires, where prolonged reconstruction timelines have displaced residents and disrupted local economies. By prioritizing streamlined coordination and leveraging the expertise of state, federal, and local agencies, AB 239 will help ensure that affected communities can rebuild faster and stronger."

The California Apartment Association adds, "According to the UCLA Anderson School of Business, the total property and capital losses of the 2025 fires in Southern California could range from \$95 billion to \$164 billion. Due to this enormous scope of damage, the Legislature is anticipating an unprecedented amount of aid to the area. AB 239 is one method to coordinate a response by the State to expedite the rebuilding in Los Angeles."

Arguments in support if amended: The Habitat for Humanity writes, “ to express our position of support if amended for AB 239 (Harabedian), an act that would establish the state-led County of Los Angeles Disaster Housing Task Force jointly convened by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) and the Office of Emergency Services (OES). We are requesting an amendment that would require the task force to include a representative from a nonprofit corporation whose primary purpose is to build, rehabilitate, or provide affordable ownership housing at or below cost to low-income households.”

Committee comment: Committee staff is aware of the ongoing dialogue with the author and other entities that would like to be expressly included the Housing Task Force. Nothing in this bill would prohibit HCD and Cal OES from adding additional members of the Housing Task Force from other impacted cities, communities or entities.

Double referral: This bill was referred from the Assembly Committee on Housing and Community Development, which approved the bill on March 26, 2025.

Urgency clause: This bill includes an urgency clause due to the immediate need to coordinate and streamline efforts to rebuild housing in communities in the Counties of Los Angeles and Ventura impacted by the wildfires that began on January 7, 2025, in the County of Los Angeles.

Related legislation: AB 783 (Caloza) of this Session. Would encourage home rebuilding by leveraging the Department of General Services to use bulk purchasing of construction materials. (Pending in the Assembly Committee on Emergency Management)

AB 1284 (Committee on Emergency Management) of this Session. Requires recovery frameworks to be developed for catastrophic planning scenarios in California. (Set to be heard on April 7, 2025 by the Committee on Emergency Management)

Previous legislation: AB 1567 (Committee on Emergency Management) of the 2021-2022 Session. Would have required Cal OES to develop a state recovery framework and assist local governments in the development of regional recovery frameworks for California’s catastrophic plans. Held in the Assembly Committee on Appropriations.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Apartment Association
California Charter Schools Association
City of Pasadena
Glendora Chamber of Commerce
Leading Age California
Mono County Board of Supervisors
Multicultural Business Alliance
Regional Chamber of Commerce San Gabriel Valley (RCCSGV)
San Gabriel Valley Economic Partnership
Valley Industry and Commerce Association (VICA)
Western Manufactured Housing Communities Association

Support If Amended

Habitat for Humanity California

Opposition

None on file.

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