

Senator Padilla's Wildfire Response and Preparedness Improvement Bill heads to the President's Desk

December 9, 2022



Recently, U.S. Senator Alex Padilla's (D-Calif.) bill to strengthen the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) wildfire preparedness and response efforts, the *FIRE Act*, cleared its final hurdle in Congress as it unanimously passed out of the U.S. Senate.

The bill now goes to the White House to be signed into law by President Biden. The *FIRE Act* is led by Representative Zoe Lofgren (D-Calif.) in the House.

The *FIRE Act* will update the *Stafford Act* that governs FEMA—which was written when the agency primarily focused on hurricanes, tornadoes, and floods. It will improve FEMA's response to wildfires by allowing FEMA to pre-deploy assets during times of highest wildfire risk, like red flag warnings, and making sure FEMA accounts for unique wildfire damages like melted infrastructure and burned debris as well as begin. Padilla's *FIRE Act* will also improve FEMA's counseling and case management services specifically for disadvantaged communities, help to ensure relocation assistance is attainable for public infrastructure in fire prone communities, ensure equal access to funding for Tribal communities and Tribal governments, and examine gaps in support and ways to speed up the federal assistance process.

“After years of increasingly catastrophic wildfires in the West, it has become clear that FEMA’s practices for helping communities respond to and recover from wildfires do not adequately meet the need,” said Senator Padilla. “The FIRE Act is an important step to help ensure that FEMA’s disaster preparedness and response efforts fully address the unique nature of wildfires and their impacts on our communities. I’m grateful to see this critical bill pass and urge the President to sign it swiftly into law.”

“Wildfires present a unique and increasing danger in California and across the country. Congress must ensure all federal agencies and statutes are set up in ways that best support our communities as they prepare for and respond to deadly fires,” said Representative Lofgren. “Wildfire assistance should not be treated as less important than hurricanes, tornadoes or floods, and our bill importantly improves and brings parity to FEMA’s efforts by focusing on disaster-specific needs. Passage of this bill is part of a whole-of-government approach to better prevent and respond to destructive wildfires.”

“California remains on the frontlines of the climate crisis, and as wildfires and drought continue to threaten our communities, we must ensure that we have the resources we need to efficiently prepare and respond to disasters,” said Rep. Thompson. “The FIRE Act will help us provide a robust response to wildfires, pre-deploy resources before potential disasters, and improve equitable disaster assistance. Proud to work with leaders such as Reps. Lofgren, Huffman, and Panetta and Senator Padilla to ensure FEMA’s disaster preparedness can fully address wildfires and the communities they impact.”

“Climate change is accelerating, and our policies need to keep pace so communities can withstand the worst of its impacts – like the devastating wildfires my district has been battling year after year,” said Rep. Huffman. “Today’s Senate vote on our FIRE Act is an important step towards reaching that goal. This bill will help FEMA evolve their practices to respond faster and prioritize the needs of impacted communities and survivors, while improving partnerships with tribal governments. I’m glad to see our bill on its way to be signed into law for the health and safety of our communities.”

“As the American West continues to endure record drought, we will continue to be threatened by catastrophic wildfires,” said Rep. Panetta. “The FIRE Act will help meet that threat by reviewing expansion of eligibility for relocation assistance to fire-prone areas and allowing FEMA to proactively deploy its resources during red flag warnings. Such critical measures will allow FEMA to provide timely, efficient, and necessary disaster preparedness that is so deserved and needed by our vulnerable communities.”

Congress’ passage of the FIRE Act under Senator Padilla’s thoughtful leadership is a critical step forward in modernizing how the federal government works with states, like California, to prepare for, respond to and recover from catastrophic wildfires and other disasters,” said Mark Ghilarducci, Director of the California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services. “California will continue to work with national leaders like Senator Padilla to continue improving policy that will enhance the capability of local, state and federal agencies to protect lives during times of crisis.”

Since taking office, Padilla has made improving the federal response to wildfires one of his top priorities. He introduced a package of bills aimed at ensuring California has the federal resources it needs to protect

communities impacted by wildfire smoke and is leading legislation aimed at battling wildfires, protecting workers, and helping combat the effects of wildfire smoke. Padilla also successfully advocated for California to receive billions for wildfire response and drought relief in the *Bipartisan Infrastructure Law*. Padilla's *Fire Suppression Improvement Act*, a bill to help ease the burden on state and local governments who are shouldering the weight of increasingly devastating wildfires was also unanimously advanced out of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee.

A one-pager of the *FIRE Act* can be found [here](#).

A section-by-section of the bill can be found [here](#).