

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1952

As Reported by House Committee On:

Innovation, Community & Economic Development, & Veterans

Title: An act relating to long-term community recovery after disasters.

Brief Description: Concerning long-term community recovery after disasters.

Sponsors: Representatives Volz, Ryu, Christian, Couture, Schmidt, Ramel, Graham, Schmick and Davis.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Innovation, Community & Economic Development, & Veterans: 1/12/24, 1/17/24 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Military Department to administer a program for long-term community recovery from an emergency or disaster.
- Supports counties and tribes by assisting with recovery planning, developing a recovery manual, issuing grants to create recovery groups, providing recovery training, and creating a resource directory.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON INNOVATION, COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, & VETERANS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 15 members: Representatives Ryu, Chair; Donaghy, Vice Chair; Rule, Vice Chair; Volz, Ranking Minority Member; Barnard, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Caldier, Chambers, Christian, Cortes, Paul, Senn, Shavers, Street, Waters and Wilcox.

Staff: Martha Wehling (786-7067).

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Background:

The Washington Military Department, under the direction of the Adjutant General, administers Washington's comprehensive program of emergency management. The Adjutant General is responsible for developing a comprehensive, all-hazard emergency plan analyzing potential hazards and identifying emergency procedures to coordinate local and state resources to respond to such hazards. The Adjutant General also coordinates all organizations for emergency management within Washington and cooperates with emergency management agencies and organizations from other states and the federal government. The Adjutant General also develops and manages an educational program for state and local government officials regarding catastrophic incidents and continuity of government planning.

An "emergency or disaster" is an event which demands immediate action to preserve public health, protect life, protect public property, or to provide relief to any stricken community, or a circumstance that reaches a dimension or degree of destructiveness that results in the Governor proclaiming a state of emergency. A "local organization for emergency services or management" is an organization created, under statute, by a state or local authority to perform local emergency management functions. "Emergency management" means the preparation for and carrying out of all emergency functions to mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies and disasters. Emergency management does not include functions for which the military forces are primarily responsible or preparation for emergency evacuation or relocation in anticipation of a nuclear attack.

Washington's Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP) provides the framework for statewide mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery activities. After a disaster occurs, response occurs in four phases: immediate, short-term, intermediate, and long-term. Long-term recovery is included in Washington's 2019 CEMP as Emergency Support Function 14, and under rule, is a required element in each political subdivision's local plan of operations.

Summary of Bill:

The Adjutant General is required to prepare and administer a program for long-term community recovery from emergency or disaster. The program will assist county governments and federally recognized Indian tribes.

The program will facilitate long-term community recovery by:

- assisting county and tribal governments with long-term community recovery planning;
- developing and updating a manual to facilitate long-term community recovery;
- issuing grants to counties and tribes to assist with the establishment and operation of long-term community recovery groups;

- providing training focused on long-term community recovery in cooperation with local organizations for emergency services or management; and
 - creating and updating a resource directory of state, federal, and international agencies; volunteer organizations; and service providers that might assist individuals and communities during long-term community recovery.
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Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Just like Washington has emergency management to respond to disasters, this is emergency management for recovery from disasters, because recovery begins the minute a disaster happens. Long-term community recovery fills in the gap and connects the dots of available support for local communities. Every community and disaster is different. Washington is an innovator in long-term community recovery groups (LTRG), but the community does not understand what it is and government is reluctant to pass dollars to LTRGs because they are not legitimized. LTRGs are the proven model for resilient communities. They work because they get the dollars closest to the location of the problem and are led by local leaders and groups. Long-term recovery is useful when the community can build on other's experiences, such as knowing what people need and how to manage the dollars. When emergency management funds are sent to counties, dollars can get hung up. In one example, it was five months after the disaster, yet caseworkers had only been working three and a half weeks. Dollars need to be prefunded in an account so good work can start happening immediately, as close to the dirt as you can get. Cities should be added as eligible recipients for technical assistance grant dollars.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) Long-term community recovery assistance will help communities better prepare for recovery following a disaster and help residents get back on their feet more quickly. This approach would have been beneficial in the Malden and Spokane wildfires. It is important to get people back on their feet, but harder to do when local emergency managers have small staff. Washington is in a nationwide shortfall; 66 percent of counties and cities have gaps in their planning activities. Long-term community recovery will directly impact their ability to provide services and locate emergency housing. In multiple disasters, communities struggle to recover. Training and resources will let communities plan for and jump start recovery.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Mike Volz, prime sponsor; Terri Cooper, Spokane Region Long Term Recovery Group; and Brandy DeLange, Association of Washington Cities.

(Other) Robert Ezelle, Washington Military Department, Emergency Management Division.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.