

Disaster Assistance Improvement and Decentralization (AID) Act

Introduced By: Senator Peter Welch (D-Vt.)

Background: Over the course of consecutive summers in July 2023 and July 2024, Vermont experienced severe storms, which led to catastrophic flooding, washouts, and mudslides. The floods damaged homes, farms, and businesses. Roads, bridges, and public infrastructure were destroyed, and communities were left reeling. In the immediate aftermath of the destruction, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provided lifesaving on-the-ground assistance. During a time of tremendous need, FEMA worked closely with local counterparts and helped the state begin the long road to recovery. In the long-term, however, FEMA's response has failed to meet the recovery needs of communities across the state.

Many small towns operate with limited resources. They lack the administrative capacity needed to navigate the complex web of federal disaster assistance authorized under the *Stafford Act*—especially in the aftermath of a disaster. At the same time, FEMA policies have forced towns to wait far too long to access federal funds. Even when funds are readily available, towns are not empowered to capitalize on their understanding of conditions on the ground.

As Vermonters know first-hand, state and local governments need more support, flexibility, and stability when dealing with natural disasters. The *Disaster Assistance Improvement and Decentralization (AID) Act* provides just that.

Legislation: The *Disaster AID Act* would improve established structures under the *Stafford Act*, advance innovative improvements to FEMA, and make the delivery of federal disaster assistance more efficient and effective. It would also enhance local capacity, expand local control, and stabilize federal funding streams—all reforms that will help our communities better prepare for and recover from disasters in the future.

Specifically, the *Disaster AID Act* would:

- Cut red tape and ease cumbersome requirements that restrict the ability of state and local governments to tailor solutions to local circumstances;
- Provide state and local governments, particularly small towns and communities that lack administrative capacity, with the technical and financial resources needed to navigate complex federal disaster assistance process; and
- Limit the power of future presidential administrations to pause or cease funding for communities in the midst of disaster recovery.