H.B. No. 2320

AN ACT

relating to services provided during and following a disaster.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1.  Subchapter C, Chapter 418, Government Code, is amended by adding Sections 418.054, 418.055, and 418.056 to read as follows:

Sec. 418.054.  COMMUNICATIONS IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING A DISASTER. The division, in collaboration with other appropriate entities selected by the division, shall to the extent practicable include private wireless communication, Internet, and cable service providers in the disaster planning process and determine the availability of the providers' portable satellite communications equipment and portable mobile telephone towers to assist in response and recovery immediately following disasters.

Sec. 418.055.  HARDENING OF UTILITY FACILITIES AND CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE. (a) In this section, "critical infrastructure" includes hospitals and fire stations.

(b)  The division shall identify methods for hardening utility facilities and critical infrastructure in order to maintain operations of essential services during disasters.

(c)  The division shall, in collaboration with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, the Railroad Commission of Texas, and any other state agencies selected by the division:

(1)  determine methods for effectively reducing risks and impacts on utility facilities and critical infrastructure from a disaster; and

(2)  encourage public and private entities that are responsible for utility facilities and critical infrastructure to implement the methods determined under Subdivision (1).

(d)  This section does not apply to a utility facility owned or controlled by a utility regulated by the Public Utility Commission of Texas.

Sec. 418.056.  REPORT ON BUILDING TRADE SERVICES FOLLOWING DISASTERS. (a) Not later than November 1, 2020, the division shall submit a report to members of the legislature on improving the oversight, accountability, and availability of building trade services following disasters. The report must include:

(1)  strategies to increase the availability of tradespeople, including plumbers and electricians, following a disaster;

(2)  approaches to increase prosecutions of alleged fraud related to building trade services offered following a disaster; and

(3)  methods to encourage performance bond requirements in contracts for building trade services to be performed following a disaster.

(b)  The division shall consult with the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation and any other state agencies selected by the division, local governments, trade associations, and law enforcement groups in preparing the report described by Subsection (a).

(c)  This section expires January 1, 2021.

SECTION 2.  Subchapter A, Chapter 17, Utilities Code, is amended by adding Section 17.010 to read as follows:

Sec. 17.010.  DISASTER BILLING AWARENESS. The commission in cooperation with the Texas Division of Emergency Management shall:

(1)  promote public awareness of bill payment assistance available during a disaster for electric, water, and wastewater services, including assistance for consumers on level billing plans; and

(2)  provide the public with information about billing practices during a disaster to ensure that consumers of electric, water, and wastewater services have an adequate understanding of their rights.

SECTION 3.  Not later than December 1, 2019, the Texas Division of Emergency Management and the Public Utility Commission of Texas shall begin the public awareness campaign required by Section 17.010, Utilities Code, as added by this Act.

SECTION 4.  This Act takes effect September 1, 2019.

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    President of the Senate Speaker of the House

I certify that H.B. No. 2320 was passed by the House on April 11, 2019, by the following vote:  Yeas 146, Nays 0, 2 present, not voting.

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Chief Clerk of the House

I certify that H.B. No. 2320 was passed by the Senate on May 15, 2019, by the following vote:  Yeas 31, Nays 0.

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Secretary of the Senate

APPROVED:  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

                    Date

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                  Governor