86R13421 SRA-D

By:  Paul H.B. No. 2320

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

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 the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and other appropriate entities, 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 A&M AgriLife Extension Service, the Public Utility Commission of Texas, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, and the Railroad Commission of Texas:

(1)  locate utility facilities and critical infrastructure in this state and determine methods for effectively reducing risks and impacts on those facilities and that 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).

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 appropriate state entities, including the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation, 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.