

By: Paul, et al.

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 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

1 and impacts on utility facilities and critical infrastructure from
2 a disaster; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 (c) This section expires January 1, 2021.

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

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

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

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

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

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