

Date of Hearing: March 26, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Matt Haney, Chair

AB 239 (Harabedian) – As Introduced January 13, 2025

SUBJECT: State-led County of Los Angeles disaster housing task force

SUMMARY: Requires the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) and the Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) to jointly convene a state-led County of Los Angeles disaster housing task force. Specifically, **this bill**:

- 1) Requires the task force to coordinate and streamline efforts between HCD, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), OES, and local governments to rebuild housing in communities impacted by the wildfire.
- 2) Requires the task force to include representatives of all of the following:
 - a) HCD;
 - b) FEMA;
 - c) OES; and
 - d) Local governments.
- 3) Requires the task force to appoint a state disaster housing coordinator to accelerate the delivery of resources, including, but not limited to, funding and technical assistance, to communities impacted by the wildfire.
- 4) Requires the task force to report to the Legislature on the status of rebuilding quarterly, from April 1, 2026 until April 1, 2030.
- 5) Contains an urgency clause.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Creates the California Emergency Services Act, which establishes the framework for disaster response, emergency management, and governmental powers during emergencies (Government Code (GOV) Sections 8550-8669.87)
- 2) Establishes the Governor's authority to declare a state of emergency and exercise emergency powers. (GOV 8625)
- 3) Authorizes the Governor to suspend regulatory statutes during emergencies to facilitate response efforts. (GOV 8571)
- 4) Grants local governments the power to declare local emergencies and request state assistance. (GOV 8630)
- 5) Creates Cal OES to coordinate disaster response and recovery. (GOV 8585)

- 6) Mandates Cal OES, in coordination with state agencies and local emergency management agencies, to establish emergency management systems and mutual aid agreements. (GC 8607)
- 7) Requires state and local agencies to cooperate in emergency response and recovery efforts. (GC 8616-8617)
- 8) Authorizes emergency funding and financial assistance for disaster recovery. (GC 8645 - 8654)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown.

COMMENTS:

Author's Statement: According to the Author, "The devastating Los Angeles fires have left thousands without homes or businesses, turning entire communities to ashes. The long and complex rebuilding process must be accelerated to provide relief to those whose lives have been shattered. AB 239 establishes a state-led disaster housing task force to coordinate recovery efforts, cutting through red tape to ensure homes are rebuilt swiftly and resiliently. This vital legislation will not only restore neighborhoods but also bring hope and stability to those facing unimaginable loss."

Palisades and Eaton Fires: On January 7, 2025, two devastating wildfires, the Palisades Fire and Eaton Fire, both ignited in Los Angeles County. The Palisades Fire began in the Santa Monica Mountains, rapidly spreading across over 23,000 acres and destroying over 6,800 structures, primarily in the Pacific Palisades community of the City of Los Angeles.¹ The Eaton Fire ignited in Eaton Canyon near Altadena, burning more than 14,000 acres, destroying over 9,400 structures.² Both fires were fully contained by January 31, 2025. Of the more than 16,000 homes and other structures destroyed, the vast majority were located in what is referred to as the wildland-urban interface, or WUI.³ The WUI is where human development meets or mixes with the undeveloped natural environment or wildlands.⁴

Executive Orders: In response to the Palisades and Eaton fires, Governor Newsom issued four executive orders in January and February 2025 intended to help the Los Angeles region rebuild permanent housing quickly. Many of the actions in the executive orders are directly related to expediting the housing approvals process, and removing permitting barriers at the state and local levels. These include requiring HCD to coordinate with local governments to identify and recommend procedures to establish rapid permitting and approval processes to expedite the reconstruction or replacement of residential properties destroyed or damaged by fire. Governor Newsom also committed to collaborating with the Legislature to identify and propose statutory amendments that durably address barriers impeding rapid rebuilding efforts in the areas affected by this emergency.

Furthermore, Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass issued an Executive Order on Expedited Community Rebuilding and Recovery on January 13, 2025. This executive order aims to

¹ <https://www.latimes.com/california/live/la-fire-updates-floods-mud-rain-closures-laguna-eaton-palisades>

² IBID.

³ <https://calmatters.org/environment/wildfires/2025/01/la-county-fires-wildland-urban-interface/>

⁴ IBID.

expedite the rebuilding process for affected residents by streamlining local permitting procedures.

Who's in Charge? Cal OES currently serves as the state's leadership hub during all major emergencies and disasters. This includes responding, directing, and coordinating local, state and federal resources and mutual aid assets across all regions to support the diverse communities across the state. Cal OES also is responsible for developing and maintaining the State Emergency Plan (SEP) and the Disaster Recovery Framework. Cal OES serves as the state's overall coordinator and agent to secure federal government resources through the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Cal OES also administers the California Disaster Assistance Acts funds and several federal emergency preparedness grant programs.

HCD also plays a critical role in the longer-term recovery process as they manage the US Department Housing and Urban Development's Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program, which are primarily intended to assist housing recovery and to benefit low and moderate income households impacted by disasters.

This bill would establish a state-led County of Los Angeles disaster housing task force, comprising of OES, HCD, FEMA, and unspecified local government representatives. It would require the task force to appoint a state disaster housing coordinator to accelerate the delivery of resources, including, but not limited to, funding and technical assistance, to communities impacted by the wildfires. The task force would also have to report to the Legislature on the status of rebuilding quarterly, from April 1, 2026 until April 1, 2030. This may help to provide transparency and structure to the rebuilding process in the Los Angeles region.

Fire Risk and Response: The devastating Palisades and Eaton Fires were not the first firestorms to destroy homes in California, nor will they be the last. A 2021 analysis by Next 10 and the University of California, Berkeley, found that more than one in 12 Californian homes is located in a high-risk wildfire area—though researchers caution that this is likely an underestimate.⁵ The report also highlighted the growing severity of wildfires, noting that before the 2020 fire season, 15 of California's 20 most destructive wildfires had occurred after 2000, with 10 of those since 2015.⁶ In 2020 alone, Californians endured five of the six largest fires in the state's history, measured by total acreage burned.⁷ Further projections estimate that due to climate change, California's wildfire burn area could increase by 77% by the end of the century.⁸

While Cal OES coordinates immediate disaster response and recovery efforts, long-term rebuilding in California has historically been less coordinated, often left to local and regional governments. For instance, Sonoma County has experienced four major wildfires since 2017—the 2017 Sonoma Complex Fire, the 2019 Kincade Fire, and the 2020 Wallbridge, Meyer (LNU Lightning Complex), and Glass Fires.⁹ In response, Sonoma County's Permit Sonoma created a

⁵ <https://www.next10.org/publications/rebuilding-resilient>

⁶ IBID

⁷ IBID

⁸ IBID

⁹ <https://permitsonoma.org/rebuilding>

dedicated website offering official rebuilding resources, including a step-by-step permitting guide with links to essential information for property owners.¹⁰

When wildfires destroy housing, local governments must act quickly, often adopting urgency ordinances and providing temporary housing resources. Sonoma County has compiled rebuilding urgency ordinances and temporary housing information,¹¹ but jurisdictions recovering from wildfires must often seek out best practices from other cities or agencies without a centralized source of information. Currently, no statewide repository exists for sharing disaster recovery and rebuilding strategies.

This bill would establish a state-led County of Los Angeles Disaster Housing Task Force to coordinate and accelerate the delivery of resources, such as funding and technical assistance, to wildfire-impacted communities. However, the bill does not currently require the task force to compile statewide best practices or create a central database for rebuilding and disaster recovery efforts. Establishing such a repository could help streamline recovery efforts across California, ensuring communities have access to critical rebuilding information when disaster strikes. This Committee may wish to consider whether it would be beneficial for this disaster housing task force to compile housing urgency ordinances, temporary housing information, and other rebuilding best practices from jurisdictions that have experienced fires, in order to make this information more readily accessible for communities that experience natural disasters in the future. This bill contains an urgency clause so it would become effective immediately after passage.

Committee Amendments: The Committee may wish to consider the following amendments:

- 1) Specifying that the City of Los Angeles and County of Los Angeles are the local governments participating in this Disaster Housing Task Force.
- 2) Requiring the task force to create a central rebuilding database on HCD's website, which will include urgency ordinances, temporary housing information, and other rebuilding best practices from jurisdictions that have experienced fires in the past.

Arguments in Support: The San Gabriel Valley Economic Partnership, Regional Chamber of Commerce San Gabriel Valley, Multicultural Business Alliance, and Glendora Chamber of Commerce write together in support: "It is critical that we rebuild quickly to ensure that residents are not driven out of their communities due to delays in construction. This has been a significant issue in other communities affected by wildfires, where prolonged reconstruction timelines have displaced residents and disrupted local economies. To avoid a similar problem, we must identify bottlenecks in the process and implement solutions to address them quickly. AB 239's requirement of quarterly reports that outline housing recovery progress, challenges, fund distribution, and future plans will provide accountability and transparency. It will ensure that impediments can be addressed and housing rebuilt quickly. By prioritizing streamlined coordination and leveraging the expertise of state, federal, and local agencies, AB 239 will help ensure that affected communities can rebuild faster and stronger."

¹⁰ IBID

¹¹ <https://share.sonoma-county.org/link/UogumzzgMUQ/>

Arguments in Opposition: None on file.

Double-referred: This bill was also referred to the Assembly Committee on Emergency Management where it will be heard should it pass out of this Committee

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Apartment Association
California Charter School Association
City of Pasadena
Glendora Chamber of Commerce
LeadingAge California
Mono County Board of Supervisors
Multicultural Business Alliance
Regional Chamber of Commerce San Gabriel Valley (RCCSGV)
San Gabriel Valley Economic Partnership
Valley Industry and Commerce Association (VICA)
Western Manufactured Housing Communities Association

Opposition

None on file.

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