



News Release

EESI Applauds U.S. Congress for Passage of Disaster Recovery Reform Act

October 4, 2018—Today, by a vote of 93-6, the U.S. Senate passed final legislation that contains \$1.68 billion for Hurricane Florence recovery as well as reforms to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) that will increase the availability of “pre-disaster mitigation” (PDM) grants to help communities better withstand future disasters. The provisions are part of H.R. 302, a package of bills that includes the long-awaited five-year reauthorization of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), which also addresses resilience to extreme weather impacts and power outages at airports. As climate change is expected to increase the intensity and impact of natural disasters, up-front spending on PDM is a sound investment. A recent study by the National Institute of Building Sciences shows that **\$1 invested in mitigation saves \$6 in recovery costs.**

The U.S. House of Representatives approved H.R. 302 on September 26th by a vote of 398-23. The bill will now go to the President, who is expected to sign the measure into law.

The FEMA reform provisions are part of the Disaster Recovery Reform Act (DRRA) that is now Division D of H.R. 302. The DRRA amends provisions of the Stafford Act (42 U.S. Code, Chapter 68), the federal statutory authority for FEMA programs. As part of the greater focus on mitigation, the legislation clarifies that PDM funds may be used by state, local and tribal governments to adopt and enforce modern building codes, which will enable communities to ‘build back better’ versus rebuilding to outdated codes. “The need to address this issue has long been a ‘fly in the ointment’ for communities,” said EESI Executive Director **Carol Werner**.

“In passing this bill, Congress has taken a major step forward in disaster preparedness,” said **Werner**. “EESI applauds this bicameral, bipartisan effort that recognizes the value of investing in mitigation and smart rebuilding as a common-sense alternative to spending billions for post-disaster rebuilding only to have it destroyed by the next storm. EESI stands ready to assist this Congress and the 116th Congress on crafting policies that will create more sustainable, equitable and resilient infrastructure and communities.”

EESI and a wide variety of advocates worked to advance DRRA. State flood plain managers, emergency managers, and others have long pressed for more attention to hazard mitigation. Earlier this year, EESI convened a diverse group of stakeholders to identify DRRA provisions that have broad support and could be collectively promoted in the Senate. Two provisions – a national PDM investment account and funds for building code adoption and enforcement – were highlighted in a letter from EESI and 19 organizations to Senate leadership in support of the legislation. These provisions were included in the final bill.

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H.R. 302 makes three major improvements in U.S. disaster policy:

- Establishes a set-aside of disaster-relief funds into a National Public Infrastructure Pre-disaster Mitigation Fund;
- Creates incentives for communities to adopt and enforce modern building codes that incorporate hazard-resilient design standards;
- Removes financial barriers for rebuilding in areas less vulnerable to the impact of natural disasters.

The FAA reauthorization bill also contains resilience measures:

- Requires the FAA to consider the emergency preparedness needs of a community served by an airport when evaluating that airport's master plan;
- Directs the Administrator to submit a report that identifies safety risks associated with airport power outages and recommends actions to improve resilience of aviation systems in such events;
- Directs the Administrator to encourage the use of durable, resilient, and sustainable materials and practices, including the use of geosynthetic materials and other innovations in carrying out FAA activities;
- Requires the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the FAA to jointly complete a study on the effect of extreme weather on commercial air travel.

EESI will continue to promote policy solutions that are economically, socially and environmentally sustainable, with additional briefings in our series on [Building Secure and Resilient Infrastructure](#).

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***The Environmental and Energy Study Institute** (www.eesi.org) is an independent, non-profit organization advancing innovative policy solutions to set us on a cleaner, more secure and sustainable energy path. EESI educates policymakers, builds coalitions and develops policy in support of energy efficiency, renewable energy, sustainable biomass, sustainable buildings, and sustainable transportation. EESI was founded by a bipartisan Congressional caucus in 1984, and its strong relationship with Congress helps EESI serve as a trusted source of credible, non-partisan information on energy and environmental issues. EESI receives no congressional funding and is supported through contributions and grants.*