

By: Senator(s) Bryan

To: Accountability,
Efficiency, Transparency;
Appropriations

SENATE BILL NO. 2842

1 AN ACT TO AMEND SECTIONS 33-15-401 AND 33-15-403, MISSISSIPPI
2 CODE OF 1972, TO ESTABLISH AN OFFICE OF DISASTER ASSISTANCE
3 COORDINATION AND ADVOCACY IN THE DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND
4 ADMINISTRATION; TO PRESCRIBE THE DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF
5 THE OFFICE RELATIVE TO SUPPORT ACTIVITIES FOR DISASTER SURVIVORS;
6 AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

7 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

8 **SECTION 1.** Section 33-15-401, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
9 amended as follows:

10 33-15-401. (1) The Legislature finds and declares the
11 following: When a major natural disaster such as Hurricane
12 Katrina occurs in Mississippi, there are various types of
13 assistance that are available to individuals and public entities
14 through the federal and state governments to help them recover
15 from the disaster. The majority of that assistance comes from the
16 federal government, and most of the federal assistance is provided
17 through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). At the
18 state level, most of the assistance is provided through the
19 Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA). However, there
20 are also programs in other federal and state agencies that provide



21 assistance and benefits to disaster victims, as well as disaster
22 assistance programs run by public and private entities and
23 disaster-related in-kind donations made by private entities and
24 individuals. Because these other disaster assistance programs and
25 in-kind donations are spread out among a number of agencies and
26 entities, disaster victims sometimes are not aware of the
27 existence of these programs and in-kind donations other than those
28 provided through FEMA and MEMA. After a disaster has occurred, it
29 would be very beneficial for the victims of the disaster to have a
30 single entity in the state, one point of contact, where
31 individuals and public entities would be able to obtain
32 information about those other disaster assistance programs and
33 disaster-related in-kind donations, obtain all of the forms and
34 materials necessary in order to receive the benefits of those
35 programs and in-kind donations, and receive assistance in
36 completing and filing the applications for those programs and
37 in-kind donations.

38 (2) The Legislature further finds that disaster victims are
39 not experts in the field of applying for disaster assistance, and
40 the State of Mississippi, is in need of additional resources to
41 assist disaster victims in applying for assistance. The intention
42 of this act is to assess and address a disaster survivor's unmet
43 needs through a disaster recovery plan. This disaster recovery
44 plan includes resources, decision-making priorities, providing
45 guidance, advocacy and tools to assist disaster survivors.



46 **SECTION 2.** Section 33-15-403, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
47 amended as follows:

48 33-15-403. (1) There is established within the * * *
49 Department of Finance and Administration a separate and distinct
50 office to be known as the Office of Disaster Assistance
51 Coordination and Advocacy. The office shall be the primary entity
52 responsible for coordinating information regarding disaster
53 assistance provided by federal agencies other than the Federal
54 Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), by state agencies other than
55 the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), and by other
56 public and private entities that provide various types of
57 assistance and benefits to victims of major natural disasters.

58 (2) The Office of Disaster Assistance Coordination and
59 Advocacy shall be authorized and empowered to appoint a Director
60 and necessary employees, and establish and equip office
61 facilities, subject to available appropriation therefor, as
62 necessary to carry out the functions assigned to the office.

63 (3) The duties and responsibilities of the Office of
64 Disaster Assistance Coordination and Advocacy shall be as follows:

65 (a) To serve as a single point of contact where
66 individuals and public entities that are victims of major
67 disasters may obtain information about all federal and state
68 programs that provide assistance and benefits to disaster victims
69 other than those provided by FEMA or MEMA, as well as information



70 about the availability of disaster-related in-kind donations by
71 private entities and individuals;

72 (b) To provide victims of major disasters with all of
73 the forms and materials necessary in order to receive the benefits
74 of those disaster assistance programs and disaster-related in-kind
75 donations, and provide them with assistance in completing and
76 filing the applications for those programs and in-kind donations;

77 (c) To coordinate and cooperate with FEMA, MEMA, other
78 federal and state agencies and other public and private entities
79 in providing and sharing information, forms and materials related
80 to disaster assistance programs and disaster-related in-kind
81 donations;

82 (d) To work with MEMA in coordinating information,
83 revenues, programs and assistance made available in Mississippi by
84 FEMA, whether directly through FEMA or through MEMA;

85 (e) To provide additional government assistance that
86 may become available after a federal disaster declaration,
87 including the following:

88 (i) Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA);

89 (ii) Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance
90 Program (D-SNAP);

91 (iii) Housing and Mortgage Relief;

92 (iv) Short-term and long-term federal student loan
93 debt relief;

94 (v) Avoiding home repair fraud;



95 (vi) Identifying debt settlement scams;
96 (viii) Low-income household assistance in paying
97 utility bills and internet connectivity;
98 (ix) Elder consumer insurance and assistance
99 benefits following a disaster;
100 (x) Landlord-tenant relief programs;
101 (xi) Crisis counseling assistance and training
102 through community-based outreach and psycho-educational services;
103 (xii) Disaster case management (DCM) plans and
104 programs;
105 (xiii) Disaster legal services (DLS);
106 (xiv) Voluntary agency coordination and long-term
107 recovery programs;
108 (xv) Home repair application services and deadline
109 advice;
110 (xvi) Disaster recovery center (DRC) facilities
111 and mobile offices; and
112 (* * *f) To perform such other duties relating to
113 disaster assistance information as may be prescribed by the
114 Governor and MEMA.

115 **SECTION 3.** This act shall take effect and be in force from
116 and after July 1, 2024.

