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Padilla, Tillis Introduce Legislation to Restore FEMA's Status as an Independent, Cabinet-Level Agency

WASHINGTON, D.C. — U.S. Senators Alex Padilla (D-Calif.) and Thom Tillis (R-N.C.) introduced the *FEMA Independence Act*, bipartisan legislation to restore the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as an independent, cabinet-level agency and improve efficiency in federal emergency response efforts.

The bill would remove FEMA from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and instead have the agency report directly to the president. It would also stipulate that FEMA's Senate-confirmed leader must have "a demonstrated ability in and knowledge of emergency management and homeland security" across the public and private sectors.

"Americans depend on FEMA for support when disaster strikes. As states like California and North Carolina continue to recover from devastating natural disasters, it's more important than ever that we strengthen and protect FEMA's lifesaving work," **said Senator Padilla**. "That starts with restoring to FEMA the independence it needs by making it a cabinet-level agency, separate from the Department of Homeland Security's competing priorities and bureaucracy. It certainly does not mean shutting it down and turning our backs on our neighbors facing unimaginable loss."

"This commonsense, bipartisan bill will help cut red tape and save lives by separating FEMA from the Department of Homeland Security and restoring its status as an independent, cabinet-level agency," **said Senator Tillis**. "With the recent devastation caused by Helene in Western North Carolina, the need for this legislation is more urgent than ever. We must pass this bipartisan legislation to help those who are suffering and get FEMA working again for those in need."

From its activation in 1979 until the *Homeland Security Act of 2002*, FEMA lived within the federal government as an independent agency under the White House. The Department of Homeland Security absorbed it in 2003, even as then-Director Michael Brown warned that doing so would "sever FEMA from its core functions."

FEMA currently sits within DHS along with almost 20 other incorporated agencies, including U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the Transportation Security Administration, the U.S. Coast Guard, and more. Under the *Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006*, its Administrator was named the principal advisor to the President of the United States for all matters related to emergency management.

In the aftermath of the devastating Los Angeles fires, Senator Padilla has introduced 10 bills to help prevent and respond to future disasters. In February, Padilla **INTRODUCED BIPARTISAN LEGISLATION** ([HTTPS://WWW.PADILLA.SENATE.GOV/NEWSROOM/PRESS-RELEASES/PADILLA-SHEEHY-HICKENLOOPER-DAINES-INTRODUCE-BIPARTISAN-BILL-TO-ESTABLISH-UNIFIED-NATIONAL-WILDFIRE-INTELLIGENCE-CENTER/](https://www.padilla.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/padilla-sheehy-hickenlooper-daines-introduce-bipartisan-bill-to-establish-unified-national-wildfire-intelligence-center/)) to create a national Wildfire Intelligence Center to streamline federal response and create a whole-of-government approach to combat wildfires. He also **ANNOUNCED A PACKAGE** ([HTTPS://WWW.PADILLA.SENATE.GOV/NEWSROOM/PRESS-RELEASES/PADILLA-INTRODUCES-BIPARTISAN-BILLS-TO-IMPROVE-FIRE-MITIGATION-AND-RESILIENCY-EFFORTS/](https://www.padilla.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/padilla-introduces-bipartisan-bills-to-improve-fire-mitigation-and-resiliency-efforts/)) of three bipartisan bills

to bolster fire resilience and proactive mitigation efforts, including the **WILDFIRE EMERGENCY ACT** ([HTTPS://WWW.PADILLA.SENATE.GOV/NEWSROOM/PRESS-RELEASES/PADILLA-INTRODUCES-BIPARTISAN-BILLS-TO-IMPROVE-FIRE-MITIGATION-AND-RESILIENCY-EFFORTS/#:~:TEXT=IT%20TO%20THEM!%E2%80%9D-,WILDFIRE%20EMERGENCY%20ACT,-THIS%20SWEEPING%20LEGISLATION](https://www.padilla.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/padilla-introduces-bipartisan-bills-to-improve-fire-mitigation-and-resiliency-efforts/#:~:TEXT=IT%20TO%20THEM!%E2%80%9D-,WILDFIRE%20EMERGENCY%20ACT,-THIS%20SWEEPING%20LEGISLATION)), the **FIRE-SAFE ELECTRICAL CORRIDORS ACT** ([HTTPS://WWW.PADILLA.SENATE.GOV/NEWSROOM/PRESS-RELEASES/PADILLA-INTRODUCES-BIPARTISAN-BILLS-TO-IMPROVE-FIRE-MITIGATION-AND-RESILIENCY-EFFORTS/#:~:TEXT=AVAILABLE%20HERE.-,FIRE%20SAFE%20ELECTRICAL%20CORRIDORS%20ACT,-THIS%20BILL%2C%20CO](https://www.padilla.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/padilla-introduces-bipartisan-bills-to-improve-fire-mitigation-and-resiliency-efforts/#:~:TEXT=AVAILABLE%20HERE.-,FIRE%20SAFE%20ELECTRICAL%20CORRIDORS%20ACT,-THIS%20BILL%2C%20CO)), and the **DISASTER MITIGATION AND TAX PARITY ACT** ([HTTPS://WWW.PADILLA.SENATE.GOV/NEWSROOM/PRESS-RELEASES/PADILLA-INTRODUCES-BIPARTISAN-BILLS-TO-IMPROVE-FIRE-MITIGATION-AND-RESILIENCY-EFFORTS/#:~:TEXT=AVAILABLE%20HERE.-,DISASTER%20MITIGATION%20AND%20TAX%20PARITY%20ACT,-THIS%20BIPARTISAN%20LEGISLATION](https://www.padilla.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/padilla-introduces-bipartisan-bills-to-improve-fire-mitigation-and-resiliency-efforts/#:~:TEXT=AVAILABLE%20HERE.-,DISASTER%20MITIGATION%20AND%20TAX%20PARITY%20ACT,-THIS%20BIPARTISAN%20LEGISLATION)). In January, Padilla **INTRODUCED ANOTHER SUITE** ([HTTPS://WWW.PADILLA.SENATE.GOV/NEWSROOM/PRESS-RELEASES/PADILLA-INTRODUCES-BIPARTISAN-LEGISLATION-TO-STRENGTHEN-WILDFIRE-RESILIENCE-AND-RECOVERY/](https://www.padilla.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/padilla-introduces-bipartisan-legislation-to-strengthen-wildfire-resilience-and-recovery/)) of bipartisan bills to strengthen wildfire recovery and resilience, including the **WILDLAND FIREFIGHTER PAYCHECK PROTECTION ACT** ([HTTPS://WWW.PADILLA.SENATE.GOV/NEWSROOM/PRESS-RELEASES/PADILLA-INTRODUCES-BIPARTISAN-LEGISLATION-TO-STRENGTHEN-WILDFIRE-RESILIENCE-AND-RECOVERY/#:~:TEXT=HAVE%20LONG%20DESERVED.%E2%80%9D-,WILDLAND%20FIREFIGHTER%20PAYCHECK,-THIS%20BIPARTISAN%20LEGISLATION](https://www.padilla.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/padilla-introduces-bipartisan-legislation-to-strengthen-wildfire-resilience-and-recovery/#:~:TEXT=HAVE%20LONG%20DESERVED.%E2%80%9D-,WILDLAND%20FIREFIGHTER%20PAYCHECK,-THIS%20BIPARTISAN%20LEGISLATION)), the **FIRE SUPPRESSION AND RESPONSE FUNDING ASSURANCE ACT** ([HTTPS://WWW.PADILLA.SENATE.GOV/NEWSROOM/PRESS-RELEASES/PADILLA-INTRODUCES-BIPARTISAN-LEGISLATION-TO-STRENGTHEN-WILDFIRE-RESILIENCE-AND-RECOVERY/#:~:TEXT=AVAILABLE%20HERE.-,FIRE%20SUPPRESSION%20AND%20RESPONSE%20FUNDING%20A,-THIS%20BILL%2C%20CO](https://www.padilla.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/padilla-introduces-bipartisan-legislation-to-strengthen-wildfire-resilience-and-recovery/#:~:TEXT=AVAILABLE%20HERE.-,FIRE%20SUPPRESSION%20AND%20RESPONSE%20FUNDING%20A,-THIS%20BILL%2C%20CO)), and the **DISASTER HOUSING REFORM FOR AMERICAN FAMILIES ACT** ([HTTPS://WWW.PADILLA.SENATE.GOV/NEWSROOM/PRESS-RELEASES/PADILLA-INTRODUCES-BIPARTISAN-LEGISLATION-TO-STRENGTHEN-WILDFIRE-RESILIENCE-AND-RECOVERY/#:~:TEXT=AVAILABLE%20HERE.-,DISASTER%20HOUSING%20REFORM%20FOR%20AMERICAN%20FAMILIES,-THIS%20LEGISLATION%2C%20SPONSORED](https://www.padilla.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/padilla-introduces-bipartisan-legislation-to-strengthen-wildfire-resilience-and-recovery/#:~:TEXT=AVAILABLE%20HERE.-,DISASTER%20HOUSING%20REFORM%20FOR%20AMERICAN%20FAMILIES,-THIS%20LEGISLATION%2C%20SPONSORED)).

Full text of the bill is available **HERE** ([HTTPS://WWW.TILLIS.SENATE.GOV/SERVICES/FILES/9203A267-F969-4849-B6C8-229B74964CB8](https://www.tillis.senate.gov/services/files/9203A267-F969-4849-B6C8-229B74964CB8)).

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Related Issues

ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

([HTTPS://WWW.PADILLA.SENATE.GOV/ABOUT/ISSUES/ENVIRONMENT/](https://www.padilla.senate.gov/about/issues/environment/))