

Senate Finance Committee

Deb Martone 271-4980

HB 165-FN, relative to the maximum amount of disaster relief funding provided to municipalities after a natural disaster.

Hearing Date: April 8, 2025

Time Opened: 1:49 p.m.

Time Closed: 1:56 p.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Gray, Innis, Pearl, Rosenwald and Watters.

Members of the Committee Absent: Senators Carson, Birdsell and Lang.

Bill Analysis: This bill increases the maximum annual amount of disaster relief funding a municipality may receive from the state disaster relief fund.

Sponsors:

Rep. J. Aron

Rep. Buco

Rep. Cloutier

Rep. Creighton

Rep. Spillane

Rep. Terry

Rep. C. McGuire

Sen. Pearl

Sen. Watters

Who supports the bill: Representative Judy Aron; Scott Burns; Janet Lucas; Daniel Richardson; Stephanie Osborne; Cynthia Vascak; Sheila Donahue; Nancy Donahue.

Who opposes the bill: Sarahlynn Williams

Summary of testimony presented in support:

Representative Judy Aron, Prime Sponsor:

- Representative Aron introduced HB 165-FN to adjust disaster relief funding for municipalities.
- The bill seeks to restore the original \$100,000 disaster relief funding for municipalities, which was reduced to \$25,000 last year.
- The current \$25,000 grant is insufficient for meaningful disaster relief in small communities. The funding is not enough to fix roads or help a community recover after natural disasters like flooding.
- This bill corrects language suggested by Homeland Security Emergency Management to clarify disaster relief funding from this program is separate from other funding sources.
- Representative Aron has been working on this legislation since the severe flooding in Acworth and other towns in 2021 and 2023. Roads in Acworth remain damaged despite previous efforts for disaster relief.

- Previous bills (SB 409 and SB 402) for disaster relief loans and state-shared payments have been ineffective as rules for accessing these funds haven't been established, even after three years.
- Representative Aron emphasized the need for timely and effective disaster relief tools for municipalities, particularly those without financial reserves such as Acworth.
- Senator Gray raised a concern about the bill's fiscal note, which indicates available funding of \$45,292. He questioned the fairness of raising the limit from \$25,000 to \$100,000, as one community could potentially exhaust the entire fund, leaving no money for other municipalities. Representative Aron responded if a community requests funding, the Fiscal Committee isn't obligated to approve the entire amount. They can deny the request if funds are unavailable. The Fiscal Committee may also look for unappropriated funds to fulfill the request. She suggested it's better not to leave a large sum of money sitting unused. Instead, the state should be able to access additional funds when a disaster occurs. HB 165-FN aims to create a statutory process that allows the state to provide disaster relief to municipalities, something that didn't exist before.
- Senator Watters asked if Representative Aron assumes that, although the fund currently has very little money, if there were any additional available funds they would be placed into this fund. Representative Aron replied this fund would be the mechanism for disbursement of additional funds.
- Senator Rosenwald asked Representative Aron if she knew what the original funding source for the fund created in 2013 was, specifically whether the funding source was the General Fund. Representative Aron replied she did not know.

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Date Hearing Report completed: April 9, 2025