



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Rich Funke

## Senate Passes Funke Act to Accelerate Utility Response to Disasters

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The New York State Senate today passed [S5242A](#), a bill sponsored by Senator **Rich Funke** to remove barriers to the deployment of in-state and out-of-state utility workers in response to a disaster. The **Facilitating Business Rapid Response to State Declared Disasters Act of 2017** would waive or delay certain licenses, registrations, taxes, and fees for utility companies and crews, while exempting state income tax on overtime hours accrued by in-state workers. **Funke's** proposal would codify in part a policy used by the Department of Taxation & Finance in response to Hurricane Sandy. The bill passed with unanimous, bipartisan support.

*“When it comes to disaster response, every second counts and every helper counts. Never is that truer than with the restoration of utilities, which can make a life or death difference for impacted families,”* said **Funke**. *“Our Act is a common sense solution to deploy as much assistance as possible when and where it matters most, while providing an additional reward for in-state workers who step up to help their fellow New Yorkers. I thank the Senate for its unanimous support and I hope the Assembly now considers this proposal with the urgency it deserves.”*

The **Facilitating Business Rapid Response to State Declared Disasters Act of 2017** would provide flexibility for out-of-state utility companies and workers who leave their homes and families to help New Yorkers in times of need by waiving or delaying certain licenses, registrations, taxes, and fees for a defined period of time after a disaster. Further, it would waive the collection of state income taxes on overtime wages accrued by in-state workers who assist with disaster response. The bill also sets clear definitions and standards for these provisions to protect the intent of the Act and prevent abuse.

On Wednesday, March 8, 2017 a windstorm impacted the Rochester region with recorded winds exceeding 80 mph, causing significant property and infrastructure damage. In the immediate aftermath, more than 100,000 customers were without power and hundreds of utility poles and transmission lines were in need of repair. Utility crews from around New York and across the northeastern United States and Canada arrived to assist with the restoration and recovery efforts. Despite the around-the-clock efforts of these workers, some customers remained without power for nearly a week during a period of frigid weather, creating public health and safety hazards. **Funke** introduced the **Facilitating Business Rapid Response to State Declared Disasters Act** on March 16, 2017.

*“We are forever grateful to the workers who spent time away from their families, hanging on poles in single digits to restore our power after the Windstorm of '17,” said **Funke**. “Growing up on a farm, my family often cited the old adage that ‘many hands make light work.’ Moving forward, our Rapid Response Act would cut red tape so New York can deploy more crews faster, restore service quicker, and get local and out-of-state workers back home to their families even sooner.”*