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TEXAS LEGISLATURE 2025

In response to failures and grieving parents, Texas lawmakers advance flood bills

Here's where the proposed laws to address camp safety, flood warnings and emergency response stand in the Legislature.

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Parents of the Camp Mystic girls who died during the Guadalupe River flooding of July 4, 2025, fill seats in the Senate chamber Thursday night to view the passage of Senate Bill 1, called the Heaven's 27 Camp Safety Act, which strengthens summer camp regulations to help prevent future tragedies. Bob Daemmrich for The Texas Tribune

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Nearly seven weeks ago on July 4, the Guadalupe River raged out of its banks and killed more than 130 people, including two teenage counselors and 25 young girls at Camp Mystic who had been asleep in their cabins before waking up to disaster.

On Aug. 21, many of the girls' parents held each other in the galleries of the Texas House and Senate, listening to their names being read aloud before lawmakers in both chambers voted on bills designed to meet the parents' demands to make camps safer, so no other parents would have to live the same horror of losing a child.

"Make no mistake, House Bill 1 is fundamentally a bill about failure," said Rep. Drew Darby, R-San Angelo, when he introduced it. "The camp failed these girls. The county failed them. The river authority failed them, and in a larger sense, their government. In some ways, I know I have failed them."

Since the floods, lawmakers have heard testimony about the many ways Texas failed not only the girls but also the 111 other people who died, including grandparents swept away with grandchildren and parents with their own children.

On Aug. 20 and in meetings before, the Camp Mystic parents had described to senators personal torture and pain. They missed the daughter who poured Cheerios for her little brother so her parents could rest, the daughter who was supposed to be holding her little sister's hand last week as she started first grade, the daughter who should be learning to shoot archery while wearing fake nails printed with miniature avocados.

And now legislators are inching closer toward changing laws to address at least pieces of the multitude of problems with flood prevention and disaster response that they'd heard about in recent weeks — many of which were not new problems at all.

"We've said it all morning long," said Rep. Ken King, R-Canadian, who chaired the House committee to look at disaster issues. "The locals can do better. We can do better. Being prepared and being ready to respond to a disaster is what we owe the citizens of Texas."

Both chambers have been moving forward bills. They aim to make justices of the peace get trained on how to handle many bodies at once. To start fixing a broken system of radio communication among first responders who struggle to get on the same channel from place to place. To get a handle on a deluge of groups that solicit donations and the thousands of volunteers who comb private property after a disaster.

They faced the egregious mistakes: Failures to get the National Weather Service warnings to people in harm's way so people would know to act and failures of county officials to be awake and alert and taking action instead of asleep and caught by a surprise.

Here's where the bills they're considering stand:

Camp Safety

- House Bill 1 would require overnight kids' camp operators to develop emergency plans and submit them to the state. The plans would have to include information on where to evacuate to. Camp staff would have to train kids at the start of each session on what to do during emergencies. Operators would also be required to install emergency warning systems and to tell parents if any part of the camp was in a floodplain.

Status: The bill passed the House and Senate and will be sent to the governor's desk to be signed into law.

- Senate Bill 1 would prohibit the state from licensing kids' camps if they had cabins near the dangerous part of a river in a floodplain. Evacuation routes would be displayed in all youth camp cabins. The bill would require all campground operators to put ladders on cabins for rooftop access and be prepared to evacuate campers if they are in a floodplain any time the National Weather Service issues a flood warning or a flash flood warning.

Status: The bill passed the Senate and the House and is on its way to the governor's desk.

Senators renamed the bill the Heaven's 27 Camp Safety Act in honor of the Mystic victims. The bill's author, Sen. Charles Perry, R-Lubbock, said SB 1 is a reminder that the Legislature is the "watchman" for the vulnerable in the state.

Camp Mystic and the family of Dick Eastland, the director of Camp Mystic who died in the flood, said in a early written statement: "We join the families in supporting legislation that will

make camps and communities along the Guadalupe River safer, especially the creation of detection and warning systems that would have saved lives on July 4. Dick Eastland gave his life fighting to save the girls whose care was entrusted to Camp Mystic.”

Flood warnings

- Senate Bill 3 would require a state agency to determine which areas in the region that flooded on July 4 should be required to have outdoor warning sirens, and then establish guidance on how to install, maintain and operate them.

Status: The Senate adopted the House amendments on a 27-0 vote on Aug. 27. The bill is headed to the governor’s desk.

Emergency response

- Senate Bill 2 would create a training program for justices of the peace on how to handle bodies during disasters when many people die, establish licensing requirements for emergency management coordinators and set up a registration system for disaster response volunteers that could include criminal history checks. It also allows the state to “neutralize” drones operating in disaster areas without government permission.

Status: The bill failed to pass after the Senate did not agree with House changes and neither chamber approved a new version before the second special session adjourned Sept. 4.

- House Bill 3 would create a Texas Interoperability Council to develop and implement a strategic plan to address the need for new and old emergency communication equipment and infrastructure to work together across the state, and training for using that equipment. The council would also administer a grant program for local governments to buy and build emergency communication equipment, such as radios and radio towers.

Status: The bill passed the House. It was never heard in the Senate.

- House Bill 20 would require the secretary of state to oversee a program for political jurisdictions to pick a nonprofit or financial institute to receive donations after disasters. It also creates new criminal offenses related to scams during disaster, such as stealing donations meant for recovery or asking for money in exchange for promising to look for or return a missing person.

Status: Both chambers approved the bill, and it is headed to the governor's desk.

Funding

- Senate Bill 5 would pull \$240 million from the rainy day fund for the state's match for federal disaster response funds and other disaster needs, \$50 million for sirens and rain gauges in the Central Texas flood region, \$28 million to improve weather forecasting and \$50 million for the new interoperability council, if House Bill 3 passes, to improve emergency communication.

Status: The bill passed the House and Senate. A group of legislators from each chamber negotiated a final version of the bill after the Senate did not agree with House changes. Both chambers approved the amended version and it will be sent to the governor's desk.

- House Bill 22 would expand a recently created, multibillion dollar broadband infrastructure fund so the money can also be used to pay for emergency communication and warning systems.

Status: The bill passed the House. It was never heard in the Senate.

- House Bill 254 would change the qualifications for the state's new rural infrastructure disaster recovery program to allow Kerrville and other rural cities to be eligible. The program would be a way for the city to get grant money for rebuilding and repairing infrastructure.

Status: The bill passed the House. It was never heard in the Senate.

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