

A Primer on State Disaster Resilience Policy and Planning

Models and Insights for Kentucky

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Pew

Kentucky is Especially Disaster-Prone

WEATHER NEWS | Published February 17, 2025 6:42am EST | Updated February 25, 2025 5:10pm EST

Death toll from devastating Kentucky floods passes 20 following week of frigid temperatures

Eastern Kentucky declared a disaster as locals recover from flooding once again

Kentucky Public Radio | By [Justin Hicks](#)
Published February 25, 2025 at 2:55 PM EST

'Flooding could end southern Appalachia': the scientists on an urgent mission to save lives

24 additional Kentucky counties approved for federal assistance after April flooding

May 14, 2025 | Updated May 14, 2025

WEATHER

Tornadoes, floods and resilience: Kentucky's year of weather so far

Rivers flood towns in Kentucky after a prolonged deluge of rain

[Nation](#) Apr 7, 2025 2:07 PM EDT

In weary Kentucky, deadly tornadoes the latest in relentless spate of storms

Three deadly storms have hit the state this year.

May 19, 2025

Kentucky is Especially Disaster-Prone



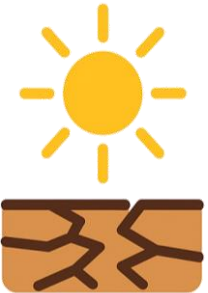
Tornadoes

According to NOAA, Kentucky averaged 28 tornadoes per year from 2000 to 2024. However, the Commonwealth exceeded that average in each year from 2021-2025.



Wildfire

Kentucky is home to 12 million acres of forest—comprising 48% of the Commonwealth's land area. On average, nearly 1,500 wildfires occur annually across the Commonwealth.



Drought

Historically, September and October are Kentucky's driest months, and it has seen drier-than-normal autumn conditions in several seasons over the past decade with so-called 'flash droughts' in 2016, 2019, and 2022.



Flooding

Catastrophic floods have impacted Kentucky and the Appalachian region on numerous occasions over the past several years. Since 2011, Kentucky has averaged 7.4 inches more precipitation each year than its historical average.

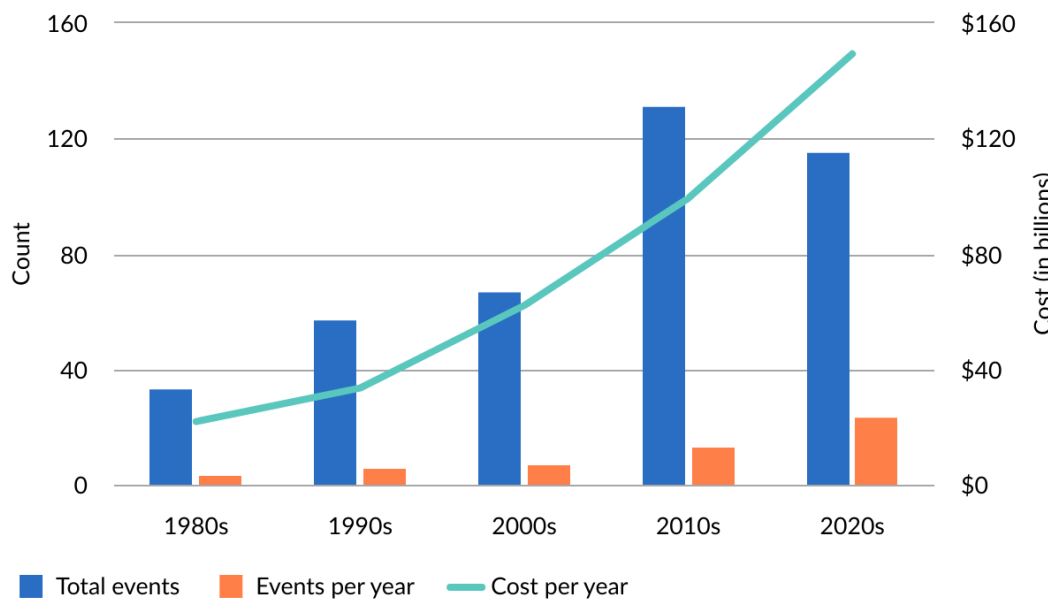
Why More States Are Leading on Resilience

Disasters are becoming more frequent and costly: Large-scale storms, floods, and other hazards are happening more often and causing greater damage—due in part to increased development in vulnerable areas.

Resilience investments pay off: Research shows every \$1 spent on mitigation and resilience can return up to \$13 in benefits through avoided damages, reduced disruptions, and faster recovery.

Local governments are on the front lines—but need support: Cities and counties often lack the staff, funding, or technical expertise to prepare for complex and recurring disaster risks. State-level coordination is essential.

Major Natural Disasters Are Growing More Frequent and Expensive
Total and annual average billion-dollar events by decade overlaid with cost trend, 1980-2024



Source: National Centers for Environmental Information
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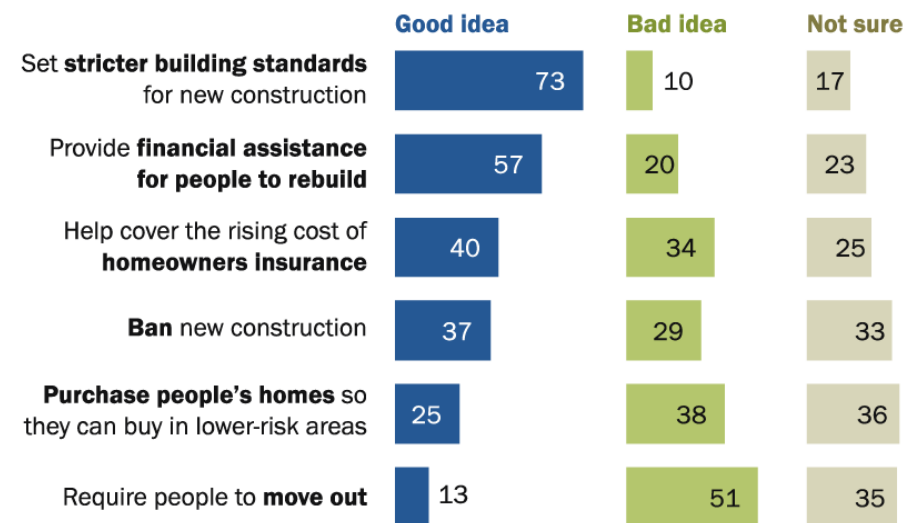
Why More States Are Leading on Resilience

Infrastructure under strain: Roads, utilities, and drainage systems are critical to daily life and business operations—but many are aging or exposed. Resilience strategies help protect these assets.

Broad public support: Most Americans, regardless of political affiliation, support common-sense measures to protect homes, businesses, and infrastructure from future disasters.

Broad support for stricter building standards for communities at high risk of extreme weather

% of U.S. adults who say it is a ___ for government to do each of the following for communities in places at high risk of extreme weather

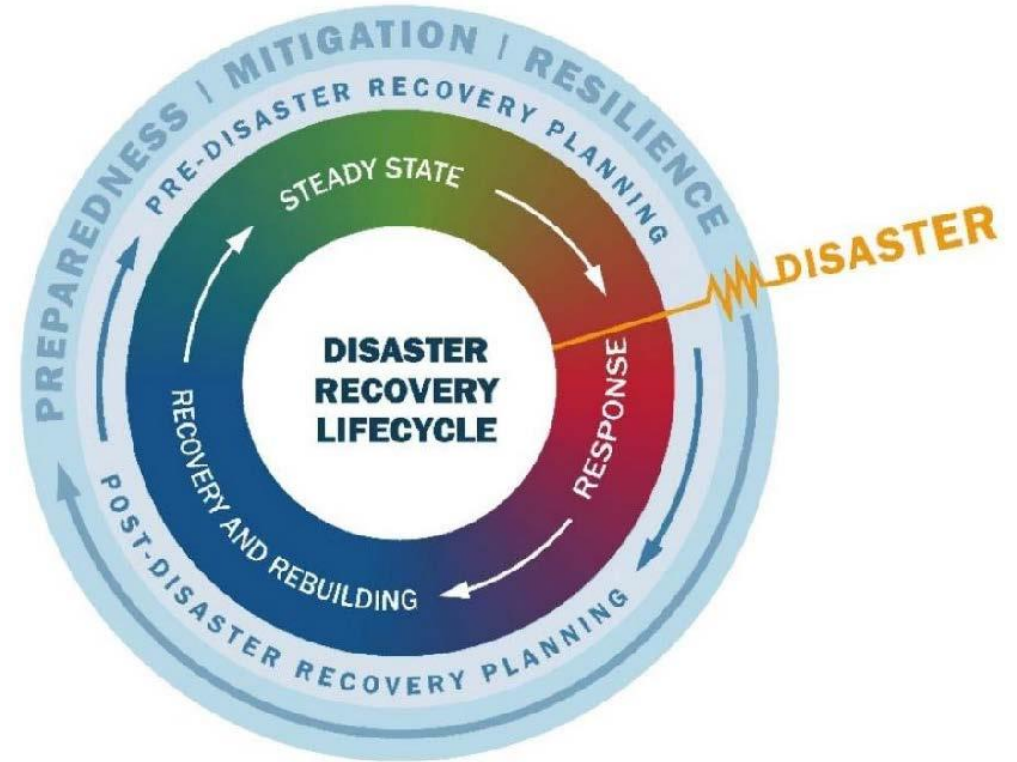


Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 13-19, 2024.
“Americans’ Extreme Weather Policy Views and Personal Experiences”

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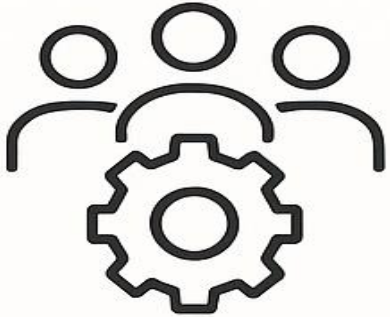
Where does Resilience Fit in the Disaster Conversation?

- Focus on pre-disaster planning and long-term risk reduction
- Coordination across agencies, alignment of funding sources, and support for local capacity
- Distinct from—but complementary to—emergency management



Source: FEMA

Where does Resilience Fit in the Disaster Conversation?



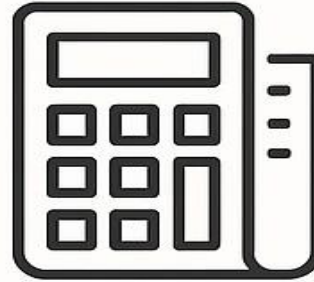
Interagency Coordination

Uniting state agencies under a common resilience strategy, often via formal councils or working groups



Strategic Planning & Risk Assessment

Leading development and implementation of statewide resilience plans, risk and vulnerability assessments



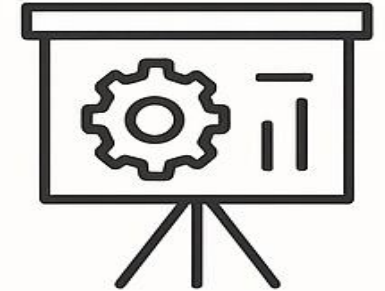
Capital Planning & Budget Input

Reviewing agency capital plans and aligning investments with resilience priorities



Grants & Funding Alignment

Identifying and coordinating federal, state, and private funding streams—often including FEMA, HUD, and DOT programs



Technical Assistance & Capacity Building

Supporting local governments and communities in developing resilience strategies and accessing resources

Three Common Models for State-Led Resilience Functions

1. Executive Order

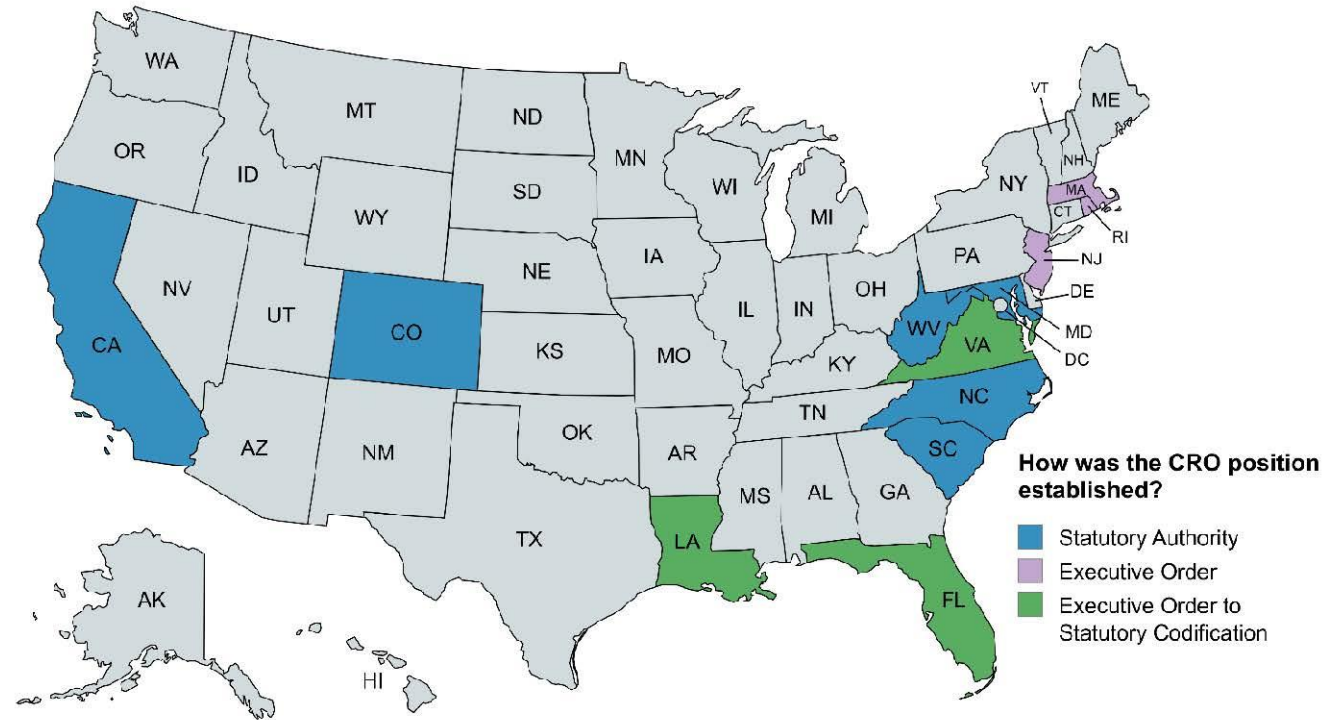
Quick to implement, vulnerable to political change

2. Statutory Authority

Provides permanence and authority

3. Executive Order → Statute (Hybrid)

Starts fast, builds durability



Source: Georgetown University

Resilience Governance – Southern State Examples



South Carolina

- ❑ CRO leads the Office of Resilience; cabinet-level authority
- ❑ Mandated Strategic Resilience and Risk Reduction Plan



Florida

- ❑ CRO position created via 2019 DeSantis EO; Office of Resilience created via 2024 statute
- ❑ Focus on flood mitigation and infrastructure



Louisiana

- ❑ Evolved from coastal emphasis to statewide focus
- ❑ Codified by the legislature in 2023
- ❑ Oversees the Interagency Resilience Coordination Team

Resilience Governance – Southern State Examples

	Alabama (HB 603/SB 346)	South Carolina	Florida	Louisiana
Establishment	Proposed statute (2025)	Statute	EO (2019) → Statute (2024)	EO (2020) → Statute (2023)
Council Structure	Yes – statutory Resilience Council	No council – Standalone agency	No council – Office within Gov’s Office	Interagency Coordination Team + Task Force
CRO Appointment	Appointed by Governor	Cabinet-level appointee	Appointed by Governor	Senate-confirmed, Governor-appointed
Resilience Plan Mandated	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Budget/Staff Authority	Not specified	Dedicated agency with funding	Statutory office, funding aligned	Can coordinate agency budgets

Case Study: Georgia

- ❑ Study Committee created by passage of HR 1432 in 2024
- ❑ Held three public meetings in August, November, December, with findings released in late December
- ❑ Recommended establishment of a State Office of Resilience and Chief Resilience Officer (CRO) position, development of statewide resilience plan



House of Representatives
Study Committee on Disaster Mitigation and Resilience

Final Report

The Honorable Clint Crowe, Chairman
Representative, 118th District

The Honorable J Collins
Representative, 71st District

The Honorable Edna Jackson
Representative, 165th District

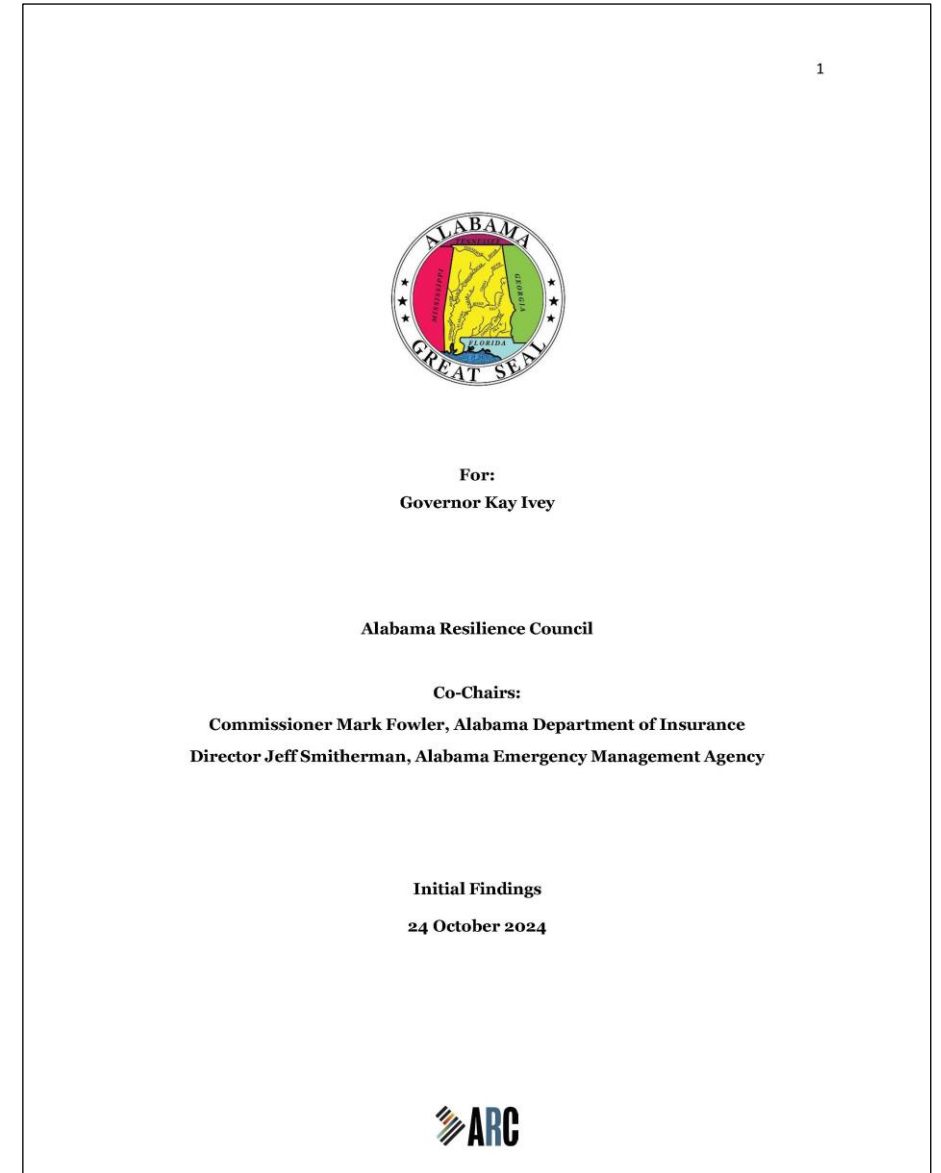
The Honorable Lynn Smith
Representative, 70th District

2024

Prepared by: Michael Satterfield, Policy Analyst
House Budget and Research Office

Case Study: Alabama

- ❑ Alabama Resilience Council created through Gov. Ivey EO 736 in 2023
- ❑ Established working groups focused on existing activities, public awareness, and water infrastructure
- ❑ Recommended establishment of a State Office of Resilience and Chief Resilience Officer (CRO) position, development of statewide resilience plan



Recommendations and Considerations for Kentucky

1. Develop a good understanding of current and future risk, projected impacts

- Consider the range of hazards that have affected Kentucky historically
- Assess emerging hazards that may cause future impacts and disruptions
- Catalog existing risk data sources maintained by state agencies, academic institutions, and private entities
- Gauge public awareness of current and future risk, existing outreach and communications mechanisms
- Identify information gaps and needed investments

Recommendations and Considerations for Kentucky

2. Catalog existing resilience activities across Commonwealth government

- Analyze roles of local, Commonwealth, and federal government in disaster preparedness, mitigation, and resilience
- Review the mechanisms and effectiveness of coordination across Commonwealth agencies, departments, and local government partners
- Identify best practices in Kentucky that may be scaled and replicated
- Assess how public investments in housing, infrastructure, economic development either align with or run counter to existing knowledge of current and future disaster risk
- Inquire how the Commonwealth can better assist county and local governments with capacity and expertise needs and gaps

Recommendations and Considerations for Kentucky

3. Survey national models for potential replication in Kentucky

- Evaluate nationally-identified best practices in resilience policy and planning for potential adoption in Kentucky
- Interview practitioners from peer states working to reduce long-term disaster risk
- Identify governance and operational structures that may be adopted in Kentucky
- Develop a ‘resilience framework’ for the Commonwealth that provides a systemic, holistic approach to long-term risk identification and reduction