

Pass the Real Emergency Access for Aging and Disability Inclusion (READI) for Disasters Act

BACKGROUND

A May 2019 GAO report found that hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria affected more than 28 million people in 2017.¹ Hurricane survivors aged 65 and older and individuals with disabilities faced challenges evacuating to safe shelter, accessing medicine, and obtaining recovery assistance. Disasters pose a significant threat to vulnerable communities, particularly people with disabilities and older residents. The complex planning surrounding the preparation and response to disasters requires a coordinated effort between federal, tribal, territorial, state, local and non-governmental agencies. Disaster management requires that all levels of public and private life come together to address the diverse needs of everyone. Without dedicated training and resources for agencies and a place at the table for disability and aging leaders, 61 million individuals with disabilities and 48 million older adults continue to be left behind. Advanced planning and coordinated communication are necessary to address the needs of people with disabilities, older adults and those with diverse access needs as the nation prepares for and responds to national disasters.

The READI for Disasters Act will ensure that a well-designed and well-executed emergency preparedness plan will be enacted before the next natural disaster thereby protecting the safety and well-being of people with disabilities and older residents before, during and after a natural disaster. It does the following:

- Establishes a National Commission on Disability Rights and Disasters to study the functional and access needs of individuals with disabilities and older adults and make recommendations for best practices to local and state agencies before, during and after a disaster.
- Creates a network of centers for research, training and technical assistance to assist states and localities to engage and support people with disabilities and older adults during and post times of disasters.
- Directs the Department of Justice to review the spending of disaster funds by federal agencies and states to ensure funds have been spent in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Creates a competitive grant program to pilot strategies for greater inclusion of people with disabilities and older adults in disaster preparation, response, recover, and mitigation.
- Requires the Department of Justice to examine how the civil rights of people with disabilities and older adults are or are not upheld during and following disasters.

REQUEST TO POLICYMAKERS

Cosponsor H.R. 3208/S. 1755 The Real Emergency Access for Aging and Disability Inclusion for Disasters Act that will establish a national commission on disability rights and disasters to study the functional and access needs of people with disabilities and older adults before, during, and after a disaster. House sponsor: Rep Jim Langevin (D-RI-2); Senate sponsor: Senator Bob Casey (D-PA).

1. GAO. May 2019. *DISASTER ASSISTANCE - FEMA Action Needed to Better Support Individuals Who Are Older or Have Disabilities*. Retrieved July 31, 2019, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/699061.pdf>.