



May 14th, 2025

Ranking Member Kirsten Gillibrand's Opening Statement “Preparing for Disasters: Unique Challenges Facing Older Americans”

Thank you, Chairman Scott for calling today's hearing.

This is an urgent and important issue and one that our state knows really quite well.

Natural disasters are dangerous for everyone, but we know they're especially dangerous for older adults and people with disabilities. Research shows that people with disabilities are up to four times more likely to die in a disaster than the general population, and that older adults are more likely to die in a disaster than any other demographic.

When Hurricane Sandy struck New York in 2012, nearly all the fatalities were people over the age of 65. In February, 2021, when a winter storm struck Jacksonville, Texas, 60 percent of the 246 deaths were people over the age of 60. We know the risks, and we know the statistics, and it's our responsibility to plan accordingly.

Older adults are much more likely to have a disability than the general population, which may impact their mobility, sensory processing, or cognitive function. We must develop accessible shelters and transportation, accessible alerts in multiple languages, and plan for relocating people who live in long-term care facilities before disaster strikes, not after.

That's one of the reasons why I introduced my Strategic Plan for Aging in the 118th Congress, and I plan to reintroduce it again in this Congress. My bill would create a new nationwide grant program under the Older Americans Act, to incentivize and support states' efforts to create their own strategic plans for aging, which would include disaster preparedness as part of it.

In addition to planning, we have to also make sure that state and local governments are properly resourced to build accessibility into their disaster recovery and response. That means safeguarding federal resources like those provided through FEMA or the Administration for Community Living.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about solutions to improve outcomes for older adults and people with disabilities during disasters.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.