



SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

Chairman Bob Casey

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

Why do we need the READI for Disasters Act?

Disasters across the nation are increasing in both intensity and frequency. Their threat to communities, especially communities with older residents and people with disabilities, continues to grow. 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 succeeds when all levels of public and private life come together to address the diverse needs of all. However, without dedicated training and resources for agencies and a place at the table for disability and aging leaders, 61 million people with disabilities and 48 million older adults often are forgotten. Coordinated planning and responses are necessary to address the needs of people with disabilities, older adults and others with access and functional needs as the nation prepares for, responds to, recovers from, and mitigates disasters.

What will the READI for Disasters Act do?

READI will ensure there is a strong disability and older adult voice in the preparation, response, recovery, and mitigation of disasters. The Act:

- Establishes a National Commission on Disability Rights and Disasters to study the needs of individuals with disabilities, older adults and others with access and functional needs and make recommendations for best practices at the local, state, and federal levels for ensuring older adults and people with disabilities are included in all aspects of disaster preparedness, including in the areas of:
 - accessible communication,
 - protection of civil rights,
 - accessible transportation and evacuation,
 - Accessible emergency sheltering, and
 - accessible health and medical services;
- Creates a network of centers focused on training and technical assistance, as well as research, to assist states and localities to better involve and support people with disabilities and older adults during and post times of disasters;
- Directs the Government Accountability Office 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. Covered activities include emergencies shelters, services, and reconstruction of buildings.
- 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; and
- 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.



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Sections 1 to 4 – Title, Findings, Purpose and Definitions

- Creates a more expansive definition of “disaster” and adds a definition for “visitability.”

Section 5 – Use of Disaster Response Funds

- Requires an advisory committee made of people with disabilities, older adults, and people with access and functional needs to oversee the use of funds.
- All funds must be used in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act.
- Clarifies that states may contract with Centers for Independent Living to provide services and supports to people with disabilities in all phases of disaster preparation, response, recovery, and mitigation.
- Requires that the use of mitigation funds and communication about the use must be made accessible.
- Funds used to rebuild residences must be used to meet visitability standards.

Section 6 – Training, Technical Assistance, and Research Disability and Disaster Centers

- Requires that Disability Training and Technical Assistance Center advisory councils must be composed of a majority of people with disabilities or older adults.
- Prioritizes grant applicants who provide experiential training about bias against people with disabilities or older adults and who can deliver curriculum in a timely manner.
- Limits Center research activity to 25 percent of allocated costs.
- Products created by the Centers must meet universal design standards.

Section 7 – Projects of National Significance

- Establishes a national significance program to examine specific issues related to increasing involvement of people with disabilities and older adults in the planning and response to disasters, identifying strategies for reducing deaths, injuries, and losses to those groups from disasters, and protecting the civil rights of people with disabilities and older adults during disasters.

Section 8 – National Commission on Disability Rights and Disasters

- Modifies and expands the National Advisory Committee on Individuals with Disabilities and Disasters to ensure it accurately represents the diversity of the disability and older adult communities.
- Requires the Committee to create plans for federal agencies to ensure people with disabilities and older adults are included in all aspects of disaster preparation, response, recovery, and mitigation.
- Requires the Committee to create a plan for continuation of a possible council or other entity to provide guidance to federal agencies.
- Appropriates \$500,000 per year for fiscal years 2022 through 2025 for the Commission.

Section 9 – Review of Department of Justice Settlement Agreements

- Requires DOJ to create an oversight Committee to review all Americans with Disabilities Act settlement agreements related to disaster response activities for the years 2005 to 2021.

Section 10 – GAO Report

- Requires the GAO to conduct a study reviewing federal funding used to prepare for, respond to, recover from, and mitigate disasters since 2005 to determine if funds expended met the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act.

If you would like more information on the READI for Disasters Act please contact Christian Clesi (Christian_Clesi@aging.senate.gov) or Michael Gamel-McCormick (Michael_Gamel-McCormick@aging.senate.gov) in Senator Casey's office.