

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

Why do we need the REAADI for Disasters Act?

Disasters across the nation are increasing in both intensity and frequency. Their threat to communities, especially communities with older residents and those 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 individuals 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 REAADI for Disasters Act do?

REAADI 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, 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 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. 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.

Updates for the 116th Congress include:

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

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

Section 5 – Use of Disaster Response Funds

- Requires that the use of mitigation funds must meet accessibility standards and for buildings meant to be residences.
- Funds used to rebuild residences must be used to meet visitability standards.
- Clarifies that states may contract with Centers for Independent Living to provide services and supports to for people with disabilities in all phases of disaster preparation, response, recovery, and mitigation.

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 8 – National Commission on Disability Rights and Disasters

- Requires the Commission 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 Commission to create a plan for continuation of a possible council or other entity to provide guidance to federal agencies

Section 10 – GAO Report

- Requires the GAO to conduct a study reviewing federal funding used to recover from Superstorm Sandy and Hurricanes Harvey and Maria to determine if funds expended met the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act.