

U.S. SENATOR BOB CASEY

 RANKING MEMBER *Special Committee on Aging*

The READI (Readying Elders and Americans with Disabilities Inclusively) for Disasters Act

Why do we need the READI for Disasters Act?

As disasters increase in intensity and frequency, their threat to communities 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.

What will the READI for Disasters Act do?

READI creates a network of centers focused on research, training and technical assistance to assist states and localities to better involve and support people with disabilities and older adults during times of disasters. It 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. It requires a review of the spending of disaster funds to ensure people with disabilities and older adults have access to services and that buildings and structures reconstructed following disasters are accessible. The bill also requires the Department of Justice to examine how civil rights of people with disabilities and older adults are treated during and following disasters.

Section-By-Section Summary

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

Officially names the legislation, lays out the purpose of the bill and details the definition of terms used.

Section 5 – Use of Disaster Response Funds

Amends the Stafford Act to address the needs of individuals with disabilities in Federal disaster funding.

Section 6 – Training and Disability and Aging Technical Assistance Disaster Centers

Creates disability and older adult disaster centers to provide technical assistance and training to State and local emergency managers and disaster relief agencies. The centers also are charged with conducting research to determine recommended practices for including people with disabilities and older adults in the planning and during and following disasters.

Section 7 – Projects of National Significance

A projects of national significance program is established to examine specific issues related to increasing involvement of people with disabilities and older adults in the planning and response to disasters and identifying strategies for reducing deaths, injuries, and losses to those groups from disasters.

Section 8 – National Commission on Disability Rights and Disasters

Establishes the National Commission on Disability Rights and Disasters. The Commission will study and provide recommendations on how to ensure emergency preparedness, disaster response, recovery and community resilience efforts meet the needs of people with disabilities and older adults.

Sections 9 and 10 – Review of Department of Justice Settlement Agreements and GAO Report

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 2017. Also directs GAO to investigate whether past federal disaster funds have been used to ensure accessibility to emergency programs and services.

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