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

Why do we need the REAADI for Disasters Act?
As the climate crisis worsens, disasters are increasing in both intensity and frequency across the Nation, threatening all communities. Although the 54 million older adults and 61 million people with disabilities living in the U.S. are at higher risk of dying during disasters than others, they are often left behind and excluded from the complex planning needed to stay safe during and after emergency events. Disaster management succeeds when all levels of public and private life come together across federal, tribal, territorial, state, local and non-governmental agencies to address the diverse needs of all. Without a place at the table for disability and aging leaders and dedicated training and resources for agencies, the groups at highest risk are often forgotten. Coordinated planning and response is necessary to explicitly address the needs of older adults, people with disabilities, and others with access and functional needs—such as language barriers, limited financial resources, or lack of transportation—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 REAADI for Disasters Act would:

- Establish a National Commission on Disability Rights and Disasters to study the needs of people with disabilities, older adults, and others with access and functional needs and make recommendations for best practices at the local, state, tribal, and federal levels for ensuring older adults and people with disabilities are included in all aspects of disaster preparedness, including:
  - accessible communication,
  - protection of civil rights,
  - accessible transportation and evacuation, and
  - accessible health and medical services.
- Create a national 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 after disasters;
- Direct 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 emergency shelters, services, and reconstruction of buildings;
- Create a competitive grant program to pilot strategies for greater inclusion of people with disabilities and older adults in disaster preparation, response, recovery, and mitigation;
- Prevent the development or implementation of potentially discriminatory crisis standards of care policies when resources are scarce during a disaster; and
- Require 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.

Section by Section Summary

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

- Describes inequitable barriers older adults and people with disabilities face during disasters and the need to include these groups in disaster preparation, response, recovery, and mitigation.
- Creates a more expansive definition of “disaster” and adds definitions for “visitability” and “public health emergency.”

Section 5 – Use of Disaster Response Funds

- Requires advisory committees to include individuals with disabilities and older adults.
- Requires contractors receiving funds to comply with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Requires facilities and services provided through response funds to be accessible to older adults and people with disabilities.
- Clarifies that states may contract with Centers for Independent Living to provide services and supports 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

- Provides grants to eligible entities to create Disability Training and Technical Assistance Centers.
- Requires Center advisory councils be composed of a majority of people with disabilities or older adults.
- Prioritizes grant applicants with experience conducting inclusive disaster management, expertise in anti-bias training, expertise in universal design, and demonstrated use of measurable collaboration and partnership strategies with governmental and non-governmental organizations.
- Outlines activities including hiring personnel with expertise in civil rights, staff training, creating partnerships, creating standards to build or rebuild accessible, affordable housing, establishing universal design and accessibility standards, and conducting research.

Section 7 – Projects of National Significance

- Establishes a program 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 from disasters to those groups.

Section 8 – Crisis Standards of Care

- Prevents jurisdictions from developing or implementing potentially discriminatory crisis standards of care policies when resources are constrained during a disaster.

Section 9 – 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 council or other entity to provide guidance to federal agencies.

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 2017.

Section 10 – GAO Report on Past Use of Disaster Funds
• 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.