

SENATE THIRD READING
SB 837 (Reyes)
As Amended August 13, 2026
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Requires Aging and Disability Resource Connections (ADRC) programs to provide disaster and emergency preparedness community education specifically designed with the goals of informing older adults and people with disabilities about emergency preparedness and promoting their safety before, during, and after natural disasters and other emergency events.

Major Provisions

- 1) Requires ADRCs to provide disaster and emergency preparedness community education specifically designed to help older adults and people with disabilities prepare for emergencies and ensure their safety before, during, and after natural disasters and other emergency events.
- 2) Allows the community education to utilize existing emergency preparedness and response tools developed by the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), the California Department of Aging (CDA), the Department of Rehabilitation (DOR), the State Department of Developmental Services and other relevant community partners.
- 3) Further provides Community education to raise awareness of existing available resources and guidance, including, but not limited to local alert systems; local emergency plans; information from the local fire department; information on emergency transportation and evacuation resources; and, information related to utility services during emergencies and natural disasters.
- 4) Makes legislative findings and declarations relating to vulnerable populations during a disaster.

COMMENTS

A report the State Auditor from 2019, "California Is Not Adequately Prepared to Protect Its Most Vulnerable Residents From Natural Disasters"¹ cites the three counties audited had not met the needs of vulnerable populations in their emergency planning. As California recovers from the most devastating fires in our history, we know the data shows older adults and people with disabilities perish in higher numbers during disasters.²

As floods, earthquakes and wildfires, as well as other natural disasters continue to plague California from coasts to deserts and north to south, we continue to identify how well we provide services to older adults.

In recent years, California has experienced an increase in the frequency and severity of wildfires, and experts project that these events will continue to occur more frequently.³ Consequently, the

¹ <https://information.auditor.ca.gov/pdfs/reports/2019-103.pdf>

² <https://www.usfa.fema.gov/statistics/deaths-injuries/older-adults.html>

³ <https://wildfiretaskforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/californiawildfireandforestresilienceactionplan.pdf>

state will likely need to protect its residents more often and from more dangerous natural disasters in the future than it has in the past.

A scholarly article from the National Institute of Health (NIH) reports on the social vulnerability of the people exposed to wildfires in U.S. West Coast states⁴ The report used an index from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to assess the social vulnerability of populations exposed to wildfire from 2000–2021 in California, Oregon, and Washington, which accounted for 90% of exposures in the western United States. The results emphasize the importance of integrating the vulnerability of at-risk populations in wildfire mitigation and adaptation plans.

Aging and Disability Resource Connections: ADRCs serve as single points of entry into the long-term services and supports (LTSS) system for older adults, people with disabilities, caregivers, veterans and families. ADRCs are the access point model of California's "no wrong door" system.

The vision behind ADRCs is to establish, in every community, highly visible and trusted sources of information where people of all incomes and ages can turn for the full range of long-term support options and smooth access to public long-term support programs and benefits. Rather than new entities or bricks-and-mortar locations, ADRCs build on the state and community's existing resources on aging and disability. On the aging side, locally this means area agencies on aging and on the disability side, independent living centers.

ADRCs provide unbiased, reliable information and counseling to individuals with all levels of income. They assist a wide range of individuals, including family caregivers, in accessing LTSS in the most desirable and appropriate setting. Since ADRCs do not limit their services to low-income individuals, they can help families of all income levels get the help they need as well as to utilize their resources more wisely, which may delay or prevent unnecessary institutionalization.⁵

A variety of supportive services are available through ADRCs. Anyone regardless of age, income and disability may receive services. These services may include:

- 1) Enhanced Information and Referral Services: Comprehensive resource information, follow-ups, and referrals via "warm hand-offs."
- 2) Options Counseling: Assist in identifying goals and needs through person-centered counseling and coordinating access to public and privately funded LTSS in the community.
- 3) Short-Term Service Coordination: Expedited access to services and support for individuals at risk of institutionalization, generally for 90 days or less, until a longer-term plan is in place.
- 4) Transition Services: For people who are currently in a hospital, nursing facility, or other institution and wishes to receive LTSS at home or in a community-based setting.⁶

Emergency Preparedness for Vulnerable Populations:

⁴ https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10511185/pdf/sciadv.adh4615.pdf?utm_source=consensus

⁵ <https://acl.gov/programs/connecting-people-services/aging-and-disability-resource-centers-programno-wrong-door>

⁶ https://aging.ca.gov/Programs_and_Services/Aging_and_Disability_Resource_Connection/

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), in both their 2022-2026 Strategic Plan and their emergency planning guidelines (Comprehensive Preparedness Guide 101, Version 2.0) articulate the need to build a culture of preparedness by ensuring representation, equity, and services for under-represented diverse populations that may be more impacted by disasters including children, seniors, individuals with disabilities or access and functional needs, individuals with diverse culture and language use, individuals with lower economic capacity, LGBTQ+ communities, and other underserved populations.

In 2008, Cal OES established the Office of Access and Functional Needs (OAFN). The office identifies the needs of persons with AFN, defined as those with developmental, intellectual, or physical disabilities; chronic conditions or injuries; limited English proficiency or non-English speaking; older adults; children, or pregnant women; those living in institutional settings; who are low-income; homeless; and from diverse cultures. Cal OES offers AFN-related training, guidance, and technical assistance to emergency managers, disability advocates, and other service providers. If requested, Cal OES will review each county's emergency plans, in consultation with individuals with various AFNs, to determine whether the plans are consistent with best practices and guidance issued by FEMA.

According to the Author

"The state has long been aware that individuals with disabilities and older adults face a disproportionate risk of death during natural disasters. A 2019 audit by the California State Auditor highlighted the critical gap in emergency management agencies' ability to support these vulnerable populations, revealing a lack of guidelines for assisting these individual in cases of emergency. Recently, wildfires in Southern California claimed the lives of several individuals with disabilities, many of whom were over the age of 70. Despite the longstanding dangers faced by this community, the state has repeatedly failed to take meaningful action.

This bill aims to address this urgent issue and ensure that we prevent further tragedies. This bill will require Aging and Disability Resource Connection programs to provide disaster and emergency preparedness training tailored to the needs of older adults and people with disabilities, equipping them with the knowledge and resources necessary to stay safe before, during, and after an emergency."

Arguments in Support

California Foundation for Independent Living Centers (CFILC), writes in support of the bill "SB 837 reflects our mission at CFILC, which is to support Independent Living Centers through various programs that assist individuals with disabilities to maintain their lives in their homes and communities. One such program is Disability Disaster Access and Resources, which enables individuals with electricity-dependent medical devices to receive life-saving aid in the event of Public Safety Power Shutoffs, as well as during hazardous events such as fires and earthquakes."

Arguments in Opposition

None.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Committee on Appropriations, fiscal impact is as follows:

- 1) Ongoing General Fund costs to Cal OES in the low hundreds of thousands of dollars annually to support implementation. This includes contract costs of \$125,000 per year for

the Office of Access and Functional Needs (OAFN) to include individuals with lived disability experience to review and develop community education materials, and other documents; and one position to collaborate with the ADRCs and OAFN, develop curriculum and online modules, and provide on-demand contract instruction for ADRCs.

- 2) CDA anticipates minor and absorbable costs to provide information to ADRCs on existing emergency preparedness and response tools but notes the potential creation of new tools may impose General Fund (GF) cost pressures on the department.

CDA also indicates GF costs of an unknown amount for ADRC programs to provide the disaster and emergency preparedness community education required by the bill. The state provides an annual \$10 million GF appropriation, administered by CDA, to the nearly two dozen designated ADRCs throughout the state. This bill adds additional requirements to the ADRCs but does not provide additional funding.

- 3) DOR anticipates minor and absorbable costs, to the extent that existing emergency preparedness and response tools are utilized (GF and federal funds).

VOTES

SENATE FLOOR: 39-0-1

YES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNERney, Menjivar, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

ABS, ABST OR NV: Reyes

ASM AGING AND LONG-TERM CARE: 7-0-0

YES: Ahrens, Ellis, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Jeff Gonzalez, Blanca Rubio, Sharp-Collins

ASM EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT: 6-0-1

YES: Ransom, Hadwick, Arambula, Bennett, Calderon, DeMaio

ABS, ABST OR NV: Bains

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-0-4

YES: Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache

ABS, ABST OR NV: Hoover, Dixon, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

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CONSULTANT: Elizabeth Fuller / AGING & L.T.C. / (916) 319-3990

FN: 0003558