



October 22, 2018

ADDRESS

Dear XXXX:

The Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs (ATAP) is writing to express our support for the *Readying Elders and Americans with Disabilities Inclusively for Disasters Act* (READI for Disasters Act), that would improve the inclusion of people with disabilities and older adults in the preparation for, response to, and recovery from major disasters. Importantly, this Act will also promote the protection of their civil rights during and after disasters.

During recent past years, millions of Americans across the nation have been affected by the devastating effects of the various natural disasters, from hurricanes and floods to forest fires and volcanic eruptions. These damaged communities not only suffer loss of infrastructure, but also endure the loss of lives. While evacuation efforts are made when possible (e.g. when storms are predicted), typically these efforts are not uniformly communicated in ways that are accessible to people with disabilities and older Americans, leaving an entire demographic vulnerable to the wreckage of such events. In fact, individuals with disabilities and older adults are more at risk for loss of life, loss of independence, and violation of civil rights than the general population during times of disasters. This demographic is disproportionately impacted as seen by the fact that, for instance, 70 percent of deaths attributed to Hurricane Maria in 2017 were people over 70 years of age.

ATAP is a membership organization representing 55 state and territory Assistive Technology Programs funded under the Assistive Technology (AT) Act of 2004. ATAP members have been and will continue to be actively involved in ensuring people with disabilities and older adults have the supports necessary to be included in all aspects of life and live independently; this includes times of natural disasters where there is a need to be prepared for such occurrences and then supported through the response and recovery period.

Therefore, ATAP strongly supports the *READI for Disasters Act*. This bill would improve the inclusion of people with disabilities and older adults in the preparation for, response to, and recovery from major disasters. Additionally it would ensure the civil rights of people with disabilities and older adults as protected; and ensure that marquee disability laws (like the *Americans with Disabilities Act* and the *Rehabilitation Act*) are complied with during these times. Furthermore, the bill would improve the coordination among the communities, governmental agencies and other non-governmental entities responding to the natural disaster the help improve how this demographic is reached and served. Overall, the intention of this legislation is to greatly improve the overall outcomes in disaster-related instances for older adults and people with disabilities which is desperately needed.

Mitigating the significantly negative effects of natural disasters should be of paramount concern in this country. Working to protect our most vulnerable populations during these catastrophic events should also be a national priority. In order to improve the emergency response to these vulnerable populations, ATAP strongly supports this piece of legislation for the safety and rescue for those with disabilities and an aged population.

We look forward to working with you to secure its passage. For any questions, please contact Audrey Busch, Executive Director of the Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs (ATAP) at Audrey.busch@ataporg.org.

Sincerely,



Audrey Busch
Executive Director
Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs (ATAP)