

Date of Hearing: June 29, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Rhodesia Ransom, Chair

SB 837 (Reyes) – As Amended January 5, 2026

SENATE VOTE: 39-0

SUBJECT: Disaster and emergency preparedness

SUMMARY: Requires Aging and Disability Resource Connections (ADRC) programs to provide disaster and emergency preparedness training 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. Specifically, **this bill:**

1. Requires ADRC programs to provide disaster and emergency preparedness training 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. Requires the training to use existing emergency preparedness and response tools developed by the Office of Emergency Services, the California Department of Aging, the Department of Rehabilitation, and other relevant community partners.
3. Specifies training will 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 various declarations and findings for purposes of this bill.

EXISTING LAW:

1. Establishes Cal OES within the office of the Governor and makes Cal OES responsible for the state's emergency and disaster response services for natural, technological, or manmade disasters and emergencies, including responsibility for activities necessary to prevent, respond to, recover from, and mitigate the effects of emergencies and disasters to people and property. (Government Code § 8550)
2. Requires Cal OES to coordinate with representatives, as specified, from the access and functional needs (AFN) population to integrate the AFN population into the SEP (Government Code § 8570.4).
3. Requires a county, upon the next update to its emergency plan, to integrate access and functional needs into its emergency plan, as specified (Government Code § 8593.3)
4. Establishes the Aging and Disability Resource Connection (ADRC) program to provide information to consumers and their families on available long-term services and supports (LTSS) programs and to assist older adults, caregivers, and persons with disabilities in

accessing LTSS programs at the local level through ADRC programs operated jointly by area agencies on aging (AAAs) and independent living centers (ILCs). (Welfare and Institutions Code § 9120)

5. Requires AAAs and ILCs to be the core local partners in developing ADRC programs. (Welfare and Institutions Code § 9120)
6. Requires ADRC programs to provide all of the following:
 - a. Enhanced information and referral services and other assistance at hours convenient to the public;
 - b. Options counseling concerning LTSS programs and public and private benefits programs;
 - c. Short-term service coordination; and,
 - d. Transition services from hospitals to home and from skilled nursing facilities to the community. (Welfare and Institutions Code § 9120)
7. Requires the ADRC to provide services within the geographic area serviced and provide information to the public about services provided by the programs. (Welfare and Institutions Code § 9120)
8. Requires the ADRC program to be administered by CDA, in collaboration with California Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) and Department of Health Care Services (DHCS), and further provides provisions related to ADRCs only become operative contingent upon appropriation of funds for that purpose by the Legislature. (Welfare and Institutions Code § 9120)
9. Develops a core model of ADRC best practices by CDA and the ADRC Advisory Committee to include person-centered practices; public outreach and coordination with key referral sources; formal follow up and data sharing. (Welfare and Institutions Code § 9120)
10. Vests in DOR the responsibility and authority to encourage the planning, development, and funding of ILCs, which are private, nonprofit organizations that provide specified services to individuals with disabilities, in order to assist those individuals in their attempts to live fuller and freer lives outside institutions. (*WIC § 19000 et seq.*)

FISCAL EFFECT:

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

The Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) estimates General Fund costs of \$372,000 in the first year and \$247,000 ongoing thereafter 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/or develop new trainings, guidance, and other documents; and state staffing resources to collaborate with the ADRCs and OAFN, develop curriculum and online modules, and provide on-demand contract instruction for ADRCs.

The California Department of Aging (CDA) indicates no immediate fiscal impact to the department, but notes that providing information on existing emergency preparedness and response tools and resources could result in minor and absorbable costs and the potential creation of new tools could result in additional cost pressures on the department (General Fund). The CDA also indicates unknown likely costs to ADRCs to provide the disaster and emergency preparedness training (General Fund).

The Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) anticipates minor and absorbable costs, to the extent that existing emergency preparedness and response tools would be utilized.

COMMENTS:

Author's Statement: "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. SB 837 (Reyes) 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."

Equity Statement: "This bill promotes equity and maximizes benefits for underserved and marginalized communities by directly addressing the disproportionate impacts that natural disasters have on people with access and functional needs. These include older adults and people with disabilities, low-income individuals, as well as individuals with chronic health conditions or other vulnerabilities. This bill advances equity by ensuring that that Aging and Disability Resource Connection (ADRC) programs provide training specifically designed for older adults and people with disabilities, who are often underserved in emergency planning. The training will incorporate materials developed in partnership with state and community-based organizations to ensure culturally competent, accessible, and effective outreach. The bill prioritizes state assistance for agencies that serve vulnerable populations."

Office of Access and Functional Needs (OAFN): California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) serves as the state's leadership hub during all major emergencies and disasters. This includes responding, directing, and coordinating state and federal resources and mutual aid assets across all regions to support the diverse communities across the state. According to Cal OES, although no two disasters are the same, every disaster disproportionately impacts individuals with access and functional needs (AFN) – people with disabilities, older adults, children, limited English proficiency, and transportation disadvantaged. In response to this unfortunate reality, the State of California established the Office of Access and Functional Needs (OAFN) within the Governor's Office of Emergency Services.

OAFN identifies the needs of individuals with disabilities and others with access or functional needs before, during, and after disasters and to integrate them into the State's emergency management systems. OAFN utilizes a "whole community approach" by offering training and

guidance to emergency managers and planners, disability advocates and other service providers responsible for planning for, responding to and helping communities recover from disasters. In short, OAFN plans for the realities of disasters by integrating access and functional needs into everything Cal OES does including partnership development, outreach, training, guidance and providing technical assistance.

Access and Functional Needs in Emergency Planning: FEMA's Mass Care and Emergency Assistance coordinates with and supports state, local, tribal, and territorial governments to provide services and resources to people with access and functional needs. FEMA asserts that developing resources and support to individuals with access and functional needs should be part of the planning process, to include services and support such as durable medical equipment, consumable medical supplies, evacuee transportation, and effective communication access.¹ California Specialized Training Institute (CSTI) offers training that brings together local emergency managers, members of the disability community, and AFN-related stakeholders to discuss integration of emergency management plans.² Additionally, in conjunction with CSTI and our whole community partners, Cal OES recently developed three AFN-specific online courses. Each course provides information, guidance, and best practices for integrating access and functional needs within emergency operation plans.

Prior to 2015, there was a lack of guidance regarding AFN considerations. In response to the active shooter attack on December 2, 2015 at the Inland Regional Center in San Bernardino, where initial reports mistakenly indicated the motive was to assault disabled individuals, Cal OES brought together a workgroup consisting of representatives from law enforcement, the California State Council on Developmental Disabilities, emergency managers, the CSTI and other disability stakeholders to update its Active Shooter Awareness Guidance.

Aging and Disability Resource Connections (ADRCs): The California Department of Aging (CDA) administers programs that serve older adults, adults with disabilities, family caregivers, and residents in long-term care facilities throughout the State. These services are provided locally by contracted agencies.³ ADRC networks focus on four main services to help individuals maintain their independence: (i) information and referral, (ii) options counseling, (iii) short-term service coordination, and (iv) transition services. As noted by the Assembly on Aging and Long Term Care:

ADRCs serve as single points of entry into the 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 AAAs and on the disability side, ILCs (independent living centers).

¹ FEMA Fact Sheet: Access and Functional Needs Support, https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_access-and-functional-needs-support_fact-sheet.pdf

² Integrating Access & Functional Needs Into Emergency Management (G197), <https://www.caloes.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/AFN/Documents/General/G197-Course-Flyer-2024.pdf>

³ https://aging.ca.gov/Providers_and_Partners/Aging_and_Disability_Resource_Connection/

Arguments in Support: LeadingAge California writes in support, “California continues to face devastating and unprecedented natural disasters. Unfortunately, older adults are often overlooked in emergency planning and response, leaving them disproportionately vulnerable. Older adults living independently often face heightened risks during emergencies due to mobility limitations, chronic health conditions, or social isolation. By leveraging the existing ADRC network, SB 837 builds on a trusted, community-based infrastructure to include emergency preparedness training. SB 837 is a positive step toward ensuring older adults receive accessible, culturally competent, and locally relevant disaster preparedness training. Additionally, this bill encourages the use of existing state and local emergency preparedness tools and promotes coordination with agencies such as the California Department of Aging and the Office of Emergency Services.”

Related Legislation:

AB 1068 (Bains, 2020) would require the CDA to prepare and submit a report, as specified, detailing the emergency services available to older Californians and people with disabilities during a natural disaster. Held in Senate Committee on Appropriations.

AB 1069 (Bains), Chapter 445, Statutes of 2025. This bill requires, as part of disaster planning and response, an AAA or an ADRC program have access to an emergency shelter, as defined, established for evacuation purposes during an active event, in order to ensure that older adults and persons with disabilities receive continuous services and necessary support.

AB 3267 (Smith), Chapter 260, Statutes of 2020. This bill requires Cal OES to coordinate with representatives of the AFN population when it updates the state plan. Cal OES is also required to complete an after-action report within 180 days after each declared disaster instead of 120 days after a declared disaster.

AB 2064 (Patterson, 2020). This bill would require Cal OES to review the emergency plans of all local governments to determine if they are consistent with the proposed best practices provisions and, upon request by a local government, provide necessary technical assistance to that local government. Held in Assembly Committee on Appropriations.

AB 2428 (Fong, 2020). This bill would require Cal OES to work with representatives from the AFN population when updating the State Emergency Plan. The bill would also require Cal OES to develop and post on or before July 1, 2021, on its website a guidance document regarding best practices for, and the lessons learned regarding, emergency and natural preparedness, for use by local governments. The bill would require Cal OES to update and post this guidance document by July 1 of each year, commencing with the year 2022. Held in Assembly Governmental Organization.

Double Referral: This bill is double referred. The Assembly Committee on Aging and Long-term Care approved this bill on June 23, 2026, on a 7-0-0 vote.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Foundation for Independent Living Centers

LeadingAge California
Orange County Fire Authority
California State Council on Developmental Disabilities (SCDD)

Opposition

None on file.

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