

SENATE LAW AND PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE, No. 3659

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: DECEMBER 16, 2021

The Senate Law and Public Safety Committee reports favorably and with committee amendments Senate Bill No. 3659.

As amended and reported by the committee, this bill requires the State Office of Emergency Management to establish a permanent unit in the office to serve the needs of State residents with access and functional needs. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound effect on residents of New Jersey with disabilities, older adults, and other at-risk groups, many of whom are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, as well as the consequences of other types of disasters and emergencies.

In 2018, the CDC estimated that 24.6% of New Jersey adult residents had a disability, which is a sizeable portion of the State's population. The economic impact on people with disabilities and their families, as well as the burden on individual health as a result of the pandemic, are an existential threat to the disability community. Accordingly, it is in the public interest for the State to engage in comprehensive planning and coordination within the northern, central, and southern regions of the State to support residents with access and functional needs.

Under the provisions of the amended bill, the unit's responsibilities are to include:

- (1) determining the needs of residents with access and functional needs before, during, and after disasters and emergencies;
- (2) determining the Statewide availability of relevant resources and assistance;
- (3) assessing and addressing the ability of residents with access and functional needs to access available resources and assistance; and
- (4) coordinating with county and local offices of emergency management and relevant resource providers to determine, expand, and implement best practices to be utilized in support of residents with access and functional needs.

The amended bill provides that the unit would consist of one full-time supervisor and a staff of three full-time planners to assist

the needs of the northern, central, and southern regions of the State in serving State residents with access and functional needs.

The amended bill defines a “resident with access and functional needs” as:

- (1) a person with a disability;
- (2) an older adult;
- (3) a person with limited English proficiency;
- (4) a person with limited access to transportation that would enable the person to prepare for, respond to, recover from, and mitigate the effects of a disaster or emergency; or
- (5) a person with limited access to financial resources that would enable the person to prepare for, respond to, recover from, and mitigate the effects of a disaster or emergency.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS:

The committee amended the bill to make clarifying and technical changes.