

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Preparing for the Worst: Bill Introduced in Assembly Readies Limited English Speakers for Major Disasters**

SACRAMENTO, CA – AB 615, sponsored by Asian Americans for Civil Rights and Equality (AACRE) and authored by Assembly Member Alberto Torrico, was introduced yesterday to assist the state in developing an emergency response plan to address the needs of vulnerable populations, specifically those who are limited English speakers.

AB 615 is a legislative response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, recent disasters in which an estimated 19,641 individuals living in the affected areas faced significant language barriers. Despite the large number of limited English proficient (LEP) individuals, evacuation orders given at these sites were conducted only in English, which imposed communication problems, delayed crucial response time, and even led to individuals being trapped in flood areas.

California is one of the nation's most disaster-prone states with earthquakes, brush fires and other natural disasters. Also, as home to 7 million LEP individuals, California is one of the most linguistically diverse states, and disasters pose a very real threat to safety if emergency preparedness planning does not account for the needs of LEP individuals. AB 615 seeks to prevent these problems by directing the Governor's Office of Emergency Services to develop a statewide emergency preparedness plan, and to assist local and regional agencies in creating their plans, so that disaster response can be improved for LEP communities.

Committees tasked with developing the statewide plan would include representatives from immigrant communities, who would ensure that all plan recommendations meet California's language needs. The Office of Emergency Services would also work with local agencies and ethnic media to distribute translated educational materials and hold trainings on outreach and assistance.

"These measures are particularly important in California, where 40% of the population speaks a language other than English at home, and natural disasters are a common occurrence," remarks Karin Wang, Vice President of Programs of the Asian Pacific American Legal Center. "This bill ensures that we have a proper response plan to reach every population, therefore mitigating potential loss of life."

"Seven million Californians are limited English proficient," comments Gen Fujioka, Director of Programs of the Asian Law Caucus. "Imagine if these 7 million people were injured or killed because they couldn't understand life-saving instructions. AB 615 can help prevent a major communications nightmare."

"During and right after a disaster, the most important thing you need besides food, water, and shelter is information," states Vincent Pan, Executive Director of CAA | Center for Asian American Advocacy. "If disaster victims can't get information about where to get help, or they can't understand the information given to them, the risk of injury or death increases. This bill will help save lives."

*AACRE is a joint partnership between CAA | Center for Asian American Advocacy, Asian Pacific American Legal Center, and Asian Law Caucus, dedicated to bringing a voice for APAs to the state capitol.*

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