



**Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities**

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460 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106 (860) 418-6157

Testimony before the **Energy and Technology, Public Safety,**

**Labor and Planning and Development Committees**

**Joint Public Hearing regarding the aftermath of Tropical Storm Irene**

**Monday, September 26, 2011**

Good Morning. My name is Frank Reed, and I am the Chair of the Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities. I am a resident of Danbury, Connecticut. The Council strives to promote the full inclusion of people of all ages by working on systems change, advocacy and capacity-building.

Since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, staff at the Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities along with two state agencies and advocates with disabilities developed a curriculum and training about Emergency Preparedness for People with Disabilities. Presentations are targeted to first responders, emergency planners, community emergency rescue teams, to explore ways to respond to people with disabilities in any disasters. These presentations highlighted the importance of having all towns maintain their own registries of people with special needs, and to plan for the necessary supports that may be required to safely evacuate and/or relocate people with disabilities during an emergency. We know that there are some state-wide registries but

some people are afraid to sign up due to concerns about their safety and the confidentiality of the information. However they may be more willing to sign up for their town's registry.

**But was Connecticut ready to meet the needs of people with disabilities during and after tropical storm Irene? NO!**

Responders did not call their residents with disabilities to see what assistance they may need during the power outage. Perhaps they were in need of having portable generators brought to their homes. Many people with disabilities rely on assistive technology e.g. stair-glides, power wheelchairs with supports, ventilators, communication devices and so forth. They are often battery powered, and it is necessary to recharge these items in order to maintain independence and to provide needed health care treatments. During these extensive power outages after tropical storm Irene, many people with disabilities had to sacrifice their comfort, safety and independence. So why weren't the CL&P and the fire responders more responsive to people with disabilities?

The Federal Emergency Management Administration has worked diligently to promote the goal of having all shelters fully accessible, functional and inclusive for all citizens, including people with disabilities. Yet, the Council heard about a shelter that actually turned away citizens from the community who were people with disabilities. We have learned that the Red Cross volunteers receive little training in working with and accommodating people with disabilities at shelters. This is a critical concern for the Council. All citizens in a community need to be assured that they can access a shelter during an emergency.

In my case prior to the storm, I received an email from CL&P stating that my family and I might be out of electricity for a week. I prepared for the storm in the best possible way so we

could remain in my house. However, my back-up battery's stair-glide ran low which made me unable to have access and independence to my bedroom. Due to my polio and the severity of my pain, I must change my positions and lie down on my bed a few times a day. I had to spend most of my time on the first floor of my house which meant I was in severe pain during the storm and for the following weeks. I was at risk of having to go to my daughter's inaccessible house because of being unable to access my stair-glide. I would have been in further pain by relocating to my daughter's house. Throughout the storm and the power outages, I was not able to get any of my questions answer from CL&P as to when my power would be restored.

I will leave you with one more example that demonstrates the dangers and hardships that people with disabilities experienced during Storm Irene. There is a young boy with developmental disability who depends on assistive devices which enables him to breath, swallow, communicate and have mobility. His mother had to make many trips to the firehouse to recharge her son's assistive technologies so he would remain alive. **So why didn't the CL&P be more responsive to people with disabilities?**

In conclusion, the Council hopes that the lessons learned from tropical storm Irene can improve the way that we assist people with disabilities during an emergency.

This includes:

1. Attention to maintaining local registries to identify people who may need special assistance during power outages or other emergencies.
2. Ensuring that CL&P accesses and attends to those registries when planning resources to respond to extensive power outages.
3. Ensuring that first responders in all communities attend to the registry when planning their response.

4. Ensuring that all shelters are adequately prepared to accommodate people with disabilities.

The Council would be glad to assist in the planning and implementation of these recommendations.

Thank You,

*Frank Reed*

Frank Reed

Chair of CT Council on Developmental Disabilities