

# Senate Bill 160

## Emergency Services: Cultural Competence

### Senator Jackson

#### SUMMARY

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Senate Bill 160 directs counties to incorporate cultural competence in their emergency plans by integrating interpreters in all emergency communications, incorporating qualified representatives from community groups during the planning process, and using culturally appropriate resources when preparing community members for emergencies or disasters.

#### BACKGROUND

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It is an inherent responsibility of government at all levels to protect life and property during an emergency. California's local governments carry out this responsibility by planning for natural and human-caused disasters. In order for these emergency plans to be effective, planners must take into account the various needs of our state's diverse population. The Legislature has recognized that communities with individuals who have developmental, intellectual, or physical disabilities, or other needs, require additional consideration in the emergency planning process. Consequently, it passed AB 2311 (Brown, Ch. 520, Stats. 2016), which required all counties to integrate planning for the access and functional needs of county residents during the next update to their emergency plans. Last year, AB 1877 (Limón, Ch. 630, Stats. 2018) furthered this effort by addressing the lack of adequate language translation services during an emergency by creating a library of translated emergency-related terms and phrases that may be used by alerting authorities when issuing emergency notifications.

While these efforts have significantly advanced integrating the needs of California's diverse communities into county emergency planning, further work needs to be done. This was made evident during a hearing of the Joint Legislative Committee on Emergency Management in November 2018, which examined how recent legislation has improved emergency alerting in California. At that hearing, witnesses described how for non-English speaking communities, language translation itself does not lead to effective communication, but also requires an understanding of the cultural dynamics of a community.

Further, even with English-speaking communities, a lack of awareness of socio-economic differences, diverse gender expressions and identities, educational levels, age, and religion, can inhibit effective emergency planning.

#### SOLUTION - SB 160

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This bill integrates the diverse needs of our state's population into local emergency planning by requiring counties to incorporate cultural competence into the next update of their emergency plan in order to ensure that the diverse cultural and linguistic needs of all residents are addressed. Specifically, SB 160 requires local emergency plans to address, at a minimum, how all cultural populations within a jurisdiction are served by:

- (1) Emergency communications;
- (2) Emergency evacuation and sheltering;
- (3) Emergency mitigation and prevention;
- (4) Emergency planning; and
- (5) Emergency preparedness.

SB 160 will direct local governments to collaborate with qualified community organizations in order to develop culturally appropriate emergency response and planning resources.

#### SUPPORT

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Women's Foundation of California, Women's Policy Institute and California Environmental Justice Alliance (Sponsor)  
Association of Regional Center Agencies

#### STATUS

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Set to be heard in Senate Governmental Organization Committee on April 9<sup>th</sup>.

#### CONTACT

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