

JACKSON INTRODUCES BILL TO ENSURE EMERGENCY PLANS ADDRESS DIVERSE POPULATION NEEDS

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SACRAMENTO -Following the deadliest and most destructive fire season in California history, **Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson (D-Santa Barbara)** introduced legislation today to ensure local governments address the diverse cultural and linguistic needs of all residents in their emergency preparations.

Senate Bill 160 directs cities and counties to incorporate cultural competence in their emergency plans by integrating interpreters and translators in 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.

“It is critical that all of our communities receive the life-saving information they need during an emergency or natural disaster,” said Senator Jackson. “With more than 220 languages spoken in California and 44% of our residents speaking a language other than English at home, we must do everything we can to ensure our emergency plans incorporate the diverse needs of all residents.”

The bill is the result of discussions during a Joint Legislative Committee on Emergency Management hearing that Senator Jackson convened in November to assess the state’s emergency alert systems. During the hearing, panelists called for improvements to emergency alert translations as well as specified plans to reach diverse populations who may be missed by traditional outreach strategies.

The Women's Foundation of California is sponsoring the bill. "As associates in the Women's Policy Institute of the Women's Foundation of California and representing environmental justice organizations, we are proud to sponsor SB 160 and work closely with Senator Jackson in ensuring our state's most overlooked communities are well equipped during emergencies. Addressing the need for cultural competency in emergency planning is a crucial step in safeguarding all Californians from the increasing threat of disasters fueled by climate change," said Lucia Marquez, Community Organizer with the Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy.

Senator Jackson has authored numerous bills to improve California’s emergency management and response. Her SB 821 was signed into law last year to allow counties to automatically sign residents up for emergency alerts, while preserving their ability to opt out of receiving them. This year, she introduced SB 46 to expand SB 821’s provisions to cities and universities, clarify that local governments can collect residents’ contact information from wireless providers, and allow local governments to identify residents with access and functional needs for the purpose of sending them specialized emergency alerts. She also authored fire prevention legislation that went into effect on January 1, 2019, including SB 1260 to allow for more prescribed burns to reduce wildfire fuels and SB 465 to help homeowners pay for fire-resistant improvements to their homes before a fire strikes.

Jackson represents the 19th Senate District, which includes all of Santa Barbara County and western Ventura County.

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