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TO: The Honorable Detroit City Council

FROM: David Whitaker, Director  
Legislative Policy Division Staff 

DATE: May 6, 2025

RE: **A RESOLUTION URGING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A VOLUNTARY  
SPECIAL NEEDS REGISTRY**

City Council Member Latisha Johnson has requested the Legislative Policy Division (LPD) to produce a resolution urging the implementation of a voluntary special needs registry. The requested resolution is attached.

Please contact our office should you have any questions or require any additional information.

**BY CITY COUNCIL MEMBER LATISHA JOHNSON**

**A RESOLUTION URGING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A VOLUNTARY SPECIAL NEEDS REGISTRY**

- WHEREAS** Extensive public-health research and emergency management practice demonstrate that residents with disabilities and access-and-functional needs (AFN), suffer disproportionate harm during emergencies and disasters when first-responders lack advance knowledge of their location or support requirements;<sup>1</sup> and
- WHEREAS** People with disabilities confront a distinct constellation of barriers during disasters, and emergency-management agencies have historically—and persistently—overlooked those barriers and failed to coordinate with disability-led and other community-based organizations that represent this population, thereby leaving critical needs unmet;<sup>2</sup> and
- WHEREAS** The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 15.7 percent of Detroit residents under the age of 65 live with at least one disability,<sup>3</sup> representing tens of thousands of individuals who may experience mobility, sensory, cognitive, or medical barriers during emergencies; and
- WHEREAS** The National Council on Disability has documented higher mortality, prolonged displacement, and disrupted medical-device use among people with disabilities in recent U.S. disasters, concluding that inclusive planning tools are “vitally important” to protect this population;<sup>4</sup> and
- WHEREAS** Special-needs registries implemented in the state of New Jersey (“Register Ready”) and in the state of Texas (the “STEAR program”) provide emergency managers with secure, privacy-protected databases that enable pre-incident evacuation mapping, welfare-check lists, and shelter accommodation planning, and are now integral components of those states’ all-hazards response frameworks;<sup>5 6</sup> and
- WHEREAS** Studies report that participation in a special-needs registry correlates with a higher likelihood that emergency services will meet the individualized requirements of persons with physical, developmental, or cognitive disabilities;<sup>7</sup> and
- WHEREAS** The historic June 25-26, 2021 floods in Detroit left residents—including AFN households—stranded in homes and vehicles, illustrating the life-safety consequences of information gaps during rapid-onset events;<sup>8</sup> **NOW, THEREFORE BE IT,**
- RESOLVED** That the Detroit City Council hereby urges the Mayor, the Chief of the Detroit Fire Department (DFD), the Chief of Police (DPD), and the City’s Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Management (DHSEM) to create and maintain a Voluntary Special Needs Registry for the City of Detroit, consistent with best practices and standards; **BE IT FINALLY**
- RESOLVED** That the Detroit City Clerk shall transmit copies of this resolution to the Mayor, the Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Management, the Detroit Fire and Police Departments, and any other pertinent city agencies to affirm the City’s commitment to establishing and maintaining a voluntary Special Needs Registry that enhances emergency preparedness and response for Detroit residents with access and functional needs.

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<sup>1</sup>Nat’l Council on Disability, *The Impacts of Extreme Weather Events on People with Disabilities* 99 (2023), <https://www.ncd.gov/assets/uploads/reports/2023/ncd-extreme-weather-2023.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, **QuickFacts: Detroit, Michigan** (ACS 2019-2023 5-Yr. Est.), <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/detroitcitymichigan> (last visited May 6, 2025).

<sup>4</sup> Nat’l Council on Disability, **The Impacts of Extreme Weather Events on People with Disabilities**, *supra* note 1.

<sup>5</sup> N.J. Office of Emergency Mgmt., **Access & Functional Needs / Register Ready** (2025), <https://nj.gov/njoem/> (last visited May 6, 2025).

<sup>6</sup> Tex. Div. of Emergency Mgmt., **State of Texas Emergency Assistance Registry (STEAR)**, <https://www.tdem.texas.gov> (last visited May 6, 2025).

<sup>7</sup> Susan Wolf-Fordham et al., *Emergency Preparedness of Families of Children with Developmental Disabilities: What Public Health and Safety Emergency Planners Need to Know*, 13 **J. EMERG. MGMT.** 7 (2015), <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4487877/> (last visited May 6, 2025).

<sup>8</sup> Jena Brooker, *One Year After Historic Floods, Detroiters Wait for Answers*, **Bridge Detroit** (June 24, 2022), <https://www.bridgedetroit.com/one-year-after-historic-floods-detroiters-wait-for-answers/> (last visited May 6, 2025).