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July 14, 2021

Honorable Anthony Portantino
Chair, Appropriations Committee
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 5050
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: AB 118 (KAMLAGER) as introduced December 18, 2020 -
SUPPORT**

Dear Senator Portantino:

Disability Rights California (DRC), a non-profit advocacy organization that advances and protects the rights of Californians with disabilities, **supports AB 118**), which will establish the Community Response Initiative to Strengthen Emergency Systems (C.R.I.S.E.S.) Act pilot grant program, to fundamentally improve emergency responses for vulnerable populations in California, by strengthening, expanding and promoting community-based responses to emergency situations. This bill is scheduled for hearing before Senate Appropriations Committee on July 15, 2021.

In many counties across the state, community organizations are successfully responding to emergency situations involving people experiencing a public health crisis, people who are unhoused, people experiencing a mental health crisis, people exposed to intimate partner or community violence, people experiencing substance abuse, and people involved in natural or climate disasters. Despite their positive impact and the cost savings that community-oriented responses to emergencies present, California has done little to support and scale these efforts. Instead, law enforcement officers continue to respond to emergencies that would be better addressed by community organizations with trained peer

support experts, mental health providers, or crisis counselors.

In many instances, involvement by law enforcement officers increases the threat of feeling unsafe, risk of arrest or deportation, harm to the individual experiencing the crisis, and unnecessary costs including the time spent by the responding officers. The presence of armed officers can unfortunately quickly escalate a crisis. In worst case scenarios, officers use force in response to a person in crisis, resulting in unnecessary and unjust deaths and serious bodily injury to those who simply need the care and support of trained professionals.

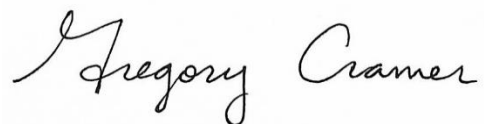
The proposed 5-year pilot program seeks to fill the void currently existing in emergency response services for vulnerable populations so that young people of color, people with disabilities, people who are gender nonconforming, people who are likely to face disproportionate police contact, people who are formerly incarcerated, people with immigration status issues and people who are unhoused or homeless can safely access quality emergency services that are culturally appropriate and from trained professionals with relationships and a track record of service in their communities. These vulnerable populations face significant barriers to engaging with law enforcement and other first responder personnel because of deep rooted fears and stigma generated by their status. In these circumstances, the presence of trained professionals from community-oriented organizations with a track-record of service can prove more beneficial than engagement from law enforcement officers.

During this current COVID-19 public health crisis, community-based organizations (CBOs) are stepping up to ensure vulnerable people are safe and healthy and meeting their emerging needs. CBOs across the state are delivering food, hand-washing stations, life-saving information, and support for survivors who are sheltering-in-place in unsafe homes. Despite the positive impact and cost savings of community-oriented responses to emergencies, California has done little to support and scale these efforts. Investing in the ability of CBOs to respond to local crises will improve the health and safety of our whole community.

While there are a wide variety of innovative community organizations engaged in successfully meeting the needs of vulnerable populations in emergency situations, California does not have a policy, a set of protocols, or dedicated funding to support and strengthen community organizations'

involvement. For these reasons, DRC supports AB 118 and respectfully requests your "Aye" vote.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gregory Cramer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'G'.

Gregory Cramer
Senior Legislative Advocate
Disability Rights California

cc: Honorable Members, Senate Appropriations Committee
Honorable Sydney Kamlager, California State Senator
Howard Quan, Legislative Director, Office of Senator Kamlager