

Brennan Center Strategic Fund

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Statement of David Pedulla, Brennan Center Strategic Fund Ready Access to Assistance Act (REAACT)

Members of the Black, Latino, and Asian Caucus, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about the Ready Access to Assistance Act (also known as REAACT, Introduction #359). My name is David Pedulla, and I am a Research Associate with the Brennan Center. I am here to ask you to support the REAACT bill in light of the commitment we share to the principles of opportunity, fairness, compassion, and accountability – the hallmarks of good government.

REAACT will enable low-income families and individuals seeking public benefits to obtain valuable assistance with the application process from advocates inside government offices.

Here are the specifics of the bill. REAACT will allow advocates to sit at help desks and provide information to assist low-income people with questions that arise in the complex application and recertification processes associated with receiving public benefits. Advocates could translate documents, provide interpretation, ease communication with government officials, and clarify program requirements to individuals frustrated when benefits are denied. Advocates could also advise people about their rights and obligations, and provide representation in interactions with government officials.

In addition, REAACT provides protections for government officials, agencies, and welfare recipients. It allows agencies to regulate the presence of advocates, and to bar tables from places where they would obstruct traffic. The bill also prohibits advocates from soliciting funds. And it limits access to the staff and volunteers of non-profit organizations serving low-income people, ensuring that the advocates present in government benefits offices are truly motivated by a desire to assist those who are seeking public benefits.

Thank you again for this opportunity. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.