>> María Palacios.

My name is María Palacios. I use she\her pronouns. I am a disabled light skinned brown woman of indigenous ancestry. I have long dark brown hair and brown eyes. I am wearing a light blue long sleeve top which has the gray pattern of a flower on one side outlined with small shiny beads. I am also wearing white headphones which rest over my head.

Today, I am representing Sins Invalid. We are a disability justice, performance art, and movement building organization whose focus centralizes on the stories of survival from the most marginalized communities… the lives of brown, poor, queer, or undocumented disabled people who exist at every single intersection of life, and do so in the midst of oppression , in the midst of an ableist world that seems to have no problem believing that disabled lives are not worth saving.

As a disabled Latina living in Texas I have experienced and witnessed the drastic circumstances faced by disabled people during and after a disaster.

When disaster strikes, the lives of disabled people face greater dangers and bigger obstacles. In a world that glorifies nondisabledness, those who are viewed as broken, are the ones society leaves behind. Disabled people, but especially brown and indigenous disabled people are always the first ones to be discarded, abandoned and left to die.

Disabled people live in danger. We live in danger of poverty. We live in danger of ignorance. We live in danger of the systematic oppression and ableist practices that to this day, thirty-two years after the ADA, continue to keep disabled people down and forced to live in danger. We always live in danger, but especially so as it relates to surviving a disaster because surviving a disaster may mean losing our mobility aids during evacuation, it could mean losing our ability to communicate. It could mean being displaced from the home that was especially designed for our independence. It means we could lose our independence and be left to rot in some institution while desperately trying to validate our humanity to the doctors, the social workers, the politicians and all the nondisabled who think being disabled means we should have no reason to live.

But we do live. We exist in the peripheral vision of the nondisabled experience…we live on the sidelines of the storylines invented by a society that constantly tries to get rid of us. We live aware of the realization that fighting for our right to exist is something we must do even without the threats of a disaster. Disabled people live knowing how ableism can casually throw away our perfectly livable disabled lives because it is easier to let us die than believe there’s real meaning to our existence. That is why to those of us existing and surviving in our brown disabled bodies, disability justice must simply become a way of life. Sharing our stories of oppression and survival is how we keep each other alive.

Part of the foundation of disability justice is the understanding that all bodies are worthy and all bodies are valuable. When we connect the dots of our human experience, we all come back to the same place of wholeness and humanity able to recognize all beings and all bodies as necessary and essential. The world needs disabled people, and disabled people need each other. Part of our strength is the recognition of this —the interdependence of our humanity IS what saves our lives.

Disability justice recognizes that wholeness must be defined outside the context of ableist body notions and expectations of nondisabled productivity. There cannot be real justice, without disability justice…as disabled people exist at every intersection of life, and disability is the only minority group anyone can join at any given time, and it is also the only minority group everyone will eventually join through the aging process. Eventually, everyone will be disabled.

We have to stop leaving disabled people behind. It is mind boggling to realize that in 2022 disabled people continue to have to slay dragons in order to acquire human rights, in order to not be denied access to life, in order to simply be seen. Please understand that as important and as crucial as these proposed legislation is, we are not asking for anything extra. We are not asking for anything special. Disability rights are always human rights and there is no justice without disability justice!

To many disabled people REAADI and DRMA would mean the difference between life and death. It could mean being able to access life-sustaining equipment or life-saving medication instead of having to die from a treatable condition. It means not having to live in so much fear of ending up forgotten and institutionalized.

REAADI and DRMA also means we will have disabled people sitting at the decision making table and the preparedness, evacuation and recovery process before, during and after a disaster. It means we will have disabled people leading the way to inclusive disaster planning. It means our voices will have a better chance of being heard. It means NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US. This is not charity. This is not something you must do for the poor disabled broken people. Collective liberation must include all of us. It must include the shared experience of our humanity and the understanding of our right to exist.

Nobody left behind.

Nobody left behind.

Nobody left behind.

Thank you so much.

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