Thank you all so
much for joining us today

for this community stakeholder call.

To hear more about the reforms

to FEMA's Disaster Assistance Program

with FEMA's ODIC or the Office
of Disability Integration

and Coordination
Director, Sherman Gillums.

My name is Shaylin Sluzalis alongside-

- [Germán] Germán
Parodi, and I use he/him.

- [Shaylin] And I use she/her pronouns.

We are the co-executive directors

of the Partnership for
Inclusive Disaster Strategies,

also known as The Partnership in short,

and for anyone that may not be as familiar

with us at The Partnership,

we are the only US
disability-led organization

with a very focused mission on equity

for people with disabilities

and people with access
and functional needs

before, during, and after
disasters and emergencies.

In other words, we are your
disability and disaster hub.

We will get started today
with a few technical support

and accessibility reminders,

and then we will pass it
off to Director Gillums

for a presentation about the new changes

in FEMA's disaster assistance program

followed by a Q&A session.

So we ask that you keep your questions

for the end of the Q&A

when we get to that,

and please feel free to add
your questions in the chat

if you're able to,

and as they come to you.

For today's technical support
and accessibility reminders,

we do have our ASL

or American Sign Language interpreters,

Andrew and Martin, who will be joining us

and they will be spotlighted for everyone.

If you would like to change
your views of your Zoom screen,

you can click the view button
at the top right hand corner

of your Zoom screen,

and click speaker or
gallery to change the view.

We also have AI captions available

through AutoAI by clicking
the live stream linked

at the top left hand
corner of your Zoom screen.

And we also have Zoom AI captions enabled,

and to see those,

you can turn on Zoom captions

by clicking the more button at the bottom

of your Zoom screen

and clicking the word captions.

We do ask that you keep yourself on mute

while not talking and
during the presentation,

and we will support you with this

if we don't see your mic muted.

And for time's sake, we will
not go through roll call

as many folks may be familiar
with at The Partnership.

We typically do a roll call
at the beginning of a call,

but for time's sake, we will
ask that you share your name,

organization affiliation,

and/or location in the chat

if the chat is accessible to you.

And during the Q&A session,

we will ask for folks
to identify themselves

before speaking as I did when I started

that this is Shaylin.

And if we don't get to
your question today,

please feel free to add it in the chat,

and we will work with Sherman

and his office to get
those questions addressed.

And lastly, if the chat
is not accessible to you,

you can also email us at info,
info@disasterstrategies.org.

And I'll also add that
in the chat for folks.

In today's reminder
and in the announcement

for today's call,

there were a number of resources
for today's presentation

that we will also add in the chat

for everyone in your ongoing learning

and as we all continue to delve

into this information together.

With that, thank you all
so much for joining us

and thank you, Sherman,
for collaborating with us

to make this call possible

and to get this important information out

to everyone in the community

on these really important changes

to FEMA's disaster assistance program.

So with that, we'll turn it over to you.

- [Sherman] Thank you
Shaylin, and thank you Germán,

for not only being the hub

for a lot of information that
we share with a lot of folks,

many of whom are on this call regularly,

but I see a bigger number.

So I'm happy to see that
there are more people

who may not be familiar
with the work that FEMA does

through the lens of
disability integration.

So I'm gonna start first
by introducing myself.

My name is Sherman Gillums.

I am the director of the Office
of Disability Integration

and Coordination.

I also fulfill the role as
FEMA's disability coordinator

established under the
Post-Katrina Emergency

Management Reform Act.

I'm a medium brown skinned
male with a bald head,

a salt and pepper five
o'clock shadow and glasses.

I have on a black FEMA polo shirt

with a FEMA logo over my left breast.

And I'm in a room with pictures,

light color paint pictures
situated around me,

and I'm happy to be here.

Let me first ask, is Johnathan Torres

from Individual Assistance
on here with me?

- [Johnathan] Yes, sir, I'm right here.

- [Sherman] Okay, just wanted
to make sure you were there.

Thank you, sir, for being here.

And I thank all of you for
attending this session.

This is pretty important.

I'll start by framing how I get here,

how I got here.

During my first full year in the role

of FEMA disability coordinator,

I understood pretty early on

that it was important to see every new

and existing FEMA policy through the lens

of lived disability experience.

And so that's what occurred

when I was given the list

of these bold reforms

to the Individual Assistance program

that were announced last
Friday, January 20th,

by FEMA administrator, Deanne Criswell.

Now, for those who may not be
familiar with the IA program,

either because you haven't
been in a disaster,

which is a good thing,

or you may not have worked with survivors,

it is the resource FEMA provides

that directly touches the
most households and survivors

after disasters

when they need it and
where they need it most.

First, I wanna commend
the FEMA administrator

for being the right
leader at the right time

as she spent an inordinate amount of time

seeing firsthand how the profound impact

that disasters have on communities

and hopes for the future for many.

These recently announced IA
reforms were the byproduct

of years of partner and
stakeholder engagement.

So they weren't created in a vacuum.

These talks started in
2021 before I got here,

as FEMA consulted with many stakeholders

and government partners at every level

to develop a new equity oriented strategy

for how we carried out
emergency management.

As we all talk about frequently,

there's an emerging reality that is made

finding ways to help survivors faster,

increasingly critical in the wake

of more frequent and
intense weather events

that occur out of season
and at a greater cost.

Last year, the United
States saw a record number

of billion dollar disasters

with dangerous weather
events in total occurring.

And this is a data point I got
from The Partnership recently

occurring at an average of every 10 days

during the calendar year, right?

So not only are we seeing more
disasters at a greater cost,

but they're happening so frequently

that it's almost becoming the norm

where that wasn't the case before.

And while we understand the danger

of these disasters impact
people of all walks,

they do proportionately
imperil those whose lives hang

in a balance because of a
pre-disaster disability.

And these risks have less to do

with the disasters themselves

and more to do with the social attitudes,

structural inaccessibility,

and what I call the
hazards of daily living

that many face even
before a disaster strikes.

Now, for those of you who
are on these calls regularly,

you may recall that in early 2023,

I released the Office of
Disability Integration

and Coordination director's
intent to the FEMA workforce.

This disability integration
guidance outlined 14 points

of inequity or disruptions
along the survivor journey

that tended to hamper recovery
for persons with disabilities

across the majority of disasters.

And these inequities
typically started with a lack

of inclusion in disaster planning

and continue through things
like inaccessible communication,

transportation, sheltering,
and ultimately housing.

The cumulative effect of these inequities

was a longer disastrous cycle on average

for survivors with disabilities

or other access and functional needs

when compared to outcomes
among other survivor groups.

Now, with these inequities in mind,

I was encouraged by how the new reforms

that I'll talk about here shortly,

will foreseeably address the
number one question we faced

during what turned out to be a record year

for billion dollar disasters.

The question was,

how can we shorten the disaster cycle

for all survivors, including
those with disabilities

and other access and functional needs?

Now, I'll do that by describing how each

of the new IA reforms
respond to this question,

starting with the common threads

that run through each of them.

First, the reforms provide
flexible funding directly

to survivors when they need it most.

And that's important because time is often

of the essence right
after a disaster strikes

during that period where
it's tough to get in

and assist people.

Second, the reforms cut red tape

and expand eligibility for more people

and help them recover faster.

And third, the reforms simplify
the application process

to meet survivors individual needs

and meet people where they are.

Now in some, these changes
bring us closer to our goal

of shortening the disaster
cycle for survivors

who have historically
faced the consequences

of disasters the longest.

Now, while many of the concerns we see

during disasters arise
during disaster recovery,

the number one concern
I often saw consistently

during my deployments

was the lack of accessible housing

for survivors with disabilities.

Many immediate needs
are critical to address

during recovery,

but the most difficult hurdle
to overcome often involved

relocating people with disabilities

to housing that restore their independence

and everyday functionality.

So I'll start by laying out

how these reforms directly
confront the scarcity

of inaccessible housing after
disasters in accessible ways.

And I wanna set this premise.

We will distribute a handout
and Germán or Shaylin,

if you wanna host that
handout in the chat,

I'm fine with it at this point.

What I want you do just carefully listen,

to these improvements

because they're not specifically focused

at survivors with disabilities.

They're focused at the broader
population of survivors.

However, as I said earlier,
it's my job along with you

to work through how these policies

affect people with disabilities.

I happen to be one of them.

You can't see it in my headshot here,

but I am a person with
a spinal cord injury

who navigates life in a wheelchair.

So I see all of these reforms

through the lens of lived experience,

and I know you all do as well.

So as I talk through them, please listen,

write down your questions.

There are certainly gonna be many.

I have Johnathan from
Individual Assistance on,

because I am not an expert

in all things individual assistance.

I am a consumer of the
benefits of that resource.

So I'm gonna talk through these

and if there are questions,

we'll be sure to answer what we can.

And if we can't at this moment,

I will answer the questions

through the leadership at The Partnership

and ensure you get those answers.

I'm gonna start by talking about
accessibility improvements.

This reform will help survivors

with disabilities improve
their living conditions

by making their homes even more accessible

than they were pre-disaster.

This means that survivors
with disabilities,

particularly those living
in lower income areas,

now have a chance to restore
their damaged properties

to a point of greater accessibility

than before the disaster.

For example, if I am a new injury,

which I was some years ago,

and my home wasn't fully accessible yet,

and maybe that was the plan,

until a disaster happened,

well, if I didn't have a ramp installed

before the disaster hit,

or if I didn't have a
platform lift in my garage

before the disaster damaged my home,

applying for resources after a disaster

was much more difficult,

because I would've had
to have those things

in order for the funding to
cover those accessibility items.

Well, with this change, these
accessibility improvements,

if you're disabled and you needed those,

you needed those enhancements in your home

but didn't have them,

you will now have funding
that will provide them

after the fact, whether they
existed or if they did exist,

whether they were inoperable,

whether they were operable
or inoperable, all right?

So this is actually an opportunity,

while disasters are never a good thing,

this goes beyond restoration to the point

where you were before a disaster

by including additional enhancements,

accessibility enhancements in the event

that your property is
damaged by a disaster.

The question came up
last week on whether this

will come against the current CAP waiver.

I was told initially that
that may not be the case,

that it will not impact the CAP waiver,

but I want to be certain about that

before I leave you with the
idea that that's the case.

I'm not sure if Johnathan is
prepared to speak to that,

but Johnathan, did you
have a point about that

or would you want us to go back

and get certainty about that answer?

- [Johnathan] No, so I mean,

the change that we're
making in the equity rule

to expand the eligibility
for real property repairs

or improvements for disability items,

I mean, that's outside
of the CAP by statute.

And so these changes will also be

outside the CAP by statute.

We're just addressing a limitation

that we had in implementing that authority

based on the way the old
regulations were written, so.

- [Sherman] Okay.
- [Johnathan] Yep.

- [Sherman] Thank you, sir.
- [Johnathan] Thank you.

- [Sherman] All right, and
I just wanna say initially

that a lot of these reforms,

while they were contemplated
over many months and years,

the practical impact they
will have on the resources

that are now available will
have to work themselves out.

I do intend to deploy to
the first several disasters

after this is fully implemented in 60 days

to make sure that we pull
out all the wrinkles.

But at this point, as I understand it,

and as Johnathan has explained,

it will not impact the current CAP waiver

for the replacement of accessibility items

such as ramps, hospital beds, et cetera.

The second reform is
displacement assistance.

This reform will provide
eligible survivors

with upfront funds

to assist with immediate
housing options of their choice

and to keep survivors housed.

This resource gives survivors
with disabilities more time

to locate accessible housing
by relaxing the requirement

to present a long-term housing plan

before receiving rental
or relocation assistance,

which was the standard that was in place

prior to this reform.

One of the things I saw
during Hurricane Ian

where a lot of people

who were either disabled or older

that chose not to leave their property.

The property was damaged.

In one case, there was a
roof that was really leaky,

but they didn't wanna leave their home.

And while that may not
make sense to some people,

for other people,

it's important that they
stay in an environment

that feels like there's safe space,

even if it incurred damage.

So this displacement
assistance will give people

with disabilities the wherewithal

to begin to look at the types of,

or the aspects of their housing situation

that they can address
with earlier support.

All right, so this is
displacement assistance.

And Johnathan, feel free to weigh in

if I leave out a point on
any particular reform here.

The third is streamlined temporary housing

assistance applications.

Now, this reform will reduce
documentation requirements

for applicants

who need to extend their stay

in FEMA supported temporary housing.

These relaxed requirements give
survivors with disabilities

more time to stay in safe, accessible,

non congregate sheltering,

such as a hotel or temporary housing,

until they can locate already
scarce accessible housing

during the recovery process.

I don't think I went to
any disaster last year

where accessible housing wasn't
a problem before a disaster.

And so when a community
is impacted in the ways

that a tornado or a hurricane

had impacted those communities I visited,

accessible housing was
already a tough situation.

It became even more difficult.

So this will give survivors
who have found a place

that's fairly safe or at least livable

more time to work on a
long-term housing plan.

The fourth reform is expanded
habitability criteria,

and I'm gonna explain this
a little bit carefully.

This reform eliminates current limitations

that made it harder for survivors

to access home repair assistance,

so they can repair all aspects
of their home post-disaster.

Now, this reform is
particularly beneficial

to survivors with disabilities

living in homes with
pre-disaster problems,

such as leaky roofs that will allow them

to make the home safer and more stable

than it was prior to a disaster.

This is not the same

as the accessibility
items or enhancements.

These are parts of a home

that have nothing to
do with accessibility,

but nonetheless are important
to the home stability.

So if it was damaged
prior to the disaster,

and I saw a lot of this
in Selma after the tornado

that hit last January

where there were already
homes in disrepair

and people living in those homes,

and then they got further damaged.

Well, before this reform,

the expectation was your home
will be repaired to the point,

as close to the point as it
was before the disaster hit.

In this case, we're looking to have homes,

we hear the term build back better.

We heard that a lot last year.

This, in fact, will allow
people to build their homes

back to a better state of livability

or habitability as it's described here.

Now, there were other
disparities in recovery

involving survivors
that included being able

to address basic human needs.

Some of the inequities I talked about

along those 14 points of
inequity in the survivor journey

included access to drinkable water

or water that allow for
good hygiene for people

with disabilities who
have to worry about things

like MRSA in congregate settings.

Back then it was Covid.

That was a big issue.

And having clean water was
important not just to drink,

but also to stay clean,

or at least sanitary
enough to administer shots,

use catheters, things like that.

So there was a need to have,

not just a stable home,

but also just being able
to tend to specific,

and these are not just conveniences,

these are necessities to stay healthy.

And I'm talking about
things like perishable food

that was part of a special diet perhaps,

or being able to buy
over-the-counter medications

because the prescribed
medications were lost.

And you could temporarily
maintain a fair state of health

with over-the-counter medications

if you could buy them and afford them.

So having funding to provide

for those initial basic necessities

was pretty critical for all survivors,

but even more critical
when it wasn't available

for survivors with disabilities
or complex conditions.

So I'm gonna talk about,

and also add that these,

some of the more,

the less common needs
for things like for me,

it will be a slide board
or wheelchair parts

if my chair was damaged.

For people with service animals,

it's buying pet food

and the cost of other necessities

that prevent your
disability from worsening

if you can afford to buy those things.

So I'll talk about
serious needs assistance,

which is the new labeling for payments

given to eligible households

to purchase essential items

that would not be
provided in all disasters

where individual assistance is given.

Now, what makes this
different from the status quo

is that critical needs assistance

was typically part of
the package that FEMA

provided upon the request of the state.

Some states asked for
it, some states didn't.

What that meant is that in some disasters,

survivors would get the initial funding,

$700 payment to buy those essential items

only if the state requested it.

But with this reform,

serious needs assistance will be given

in all disasters, right?

And when we talk about equity,

we're talking about
eliminating the aspects

or factors in a disaster

that make one person's recovery different

or less optimal than others.

Well, this will equalize

access to that upfront funding

to get those basic necessities

when a disaster hits,
no matter where it hits,

as long as individual assistance
is a part of the package

that FEMA gives to the state.

And that's all based
on the level of damage,

the number of people
displaced, things like that.

So again, this will replace
critical needs assistance

that was given only at
the state's discretion

by making serious needs
assistance available

to all survivors, where
individual assistance

is a part of the recovery package.

The next reform deals with
underinsured survivors.

This reform will help cover aspects

of home repair that insurance
companies won't pay for,

but survivors can't afford on their own

up to the full amount of $42,500.

This change marks the first
time in FEMA's history

that survivors will be able to,

or will be eligible for the
full amount in assistance

to make sure they have the tools they need

to jumpstart their recovery.

This reform will benefit
survivors with disabilities

who bear the cost of
higher rates of coverage

for parts of a home that
include additional enhancements

because of a disability.

This could be something
like whole house generators

and hardwood floors that are not typically

viewed as disability enhancements.

But I can tell you firsthand

that having a whole house generator

and a house with hardwood floors

were in fact accessibility
projects for me,

even though I couldn't
claim them that way.

And so when I have to
get insurance coverage,

having those things,
those additional things

may make your rates a little higher.

And this reform for underinsured survivors

will ensure that FEMA is
in a position to cover

what the insurance
companies could not, right?

Next reform and we've got

about maybe four more
left here to talk about,

simplified assistance for entrepreneurs.

Something we don't hear
about a lot in disasters

is the impact that disasters
have on home businesses.

We also don't talk a lot
about the fact that people

with disabilities make
for great entrepreneurs.

Not only are they great
at problem solving,

but they're also great at problem solving

for broader society

and find ways to become
an asset to society

through home businesses.

This simplified assistance

for entrepreneurs provides
self-employed survivors

with disabilities,

some initial financial support

to replace disaster damage tools

and equipment to help
'em land on their feet,

or bring their lives back in balance.

You think about a person with a disability

who may have a consulting business

and who uses screen
readers that, you know,

computer equipment and
things that are adapted

for the individual to make some income.

If those things become damaged,

it wasn't the case that they could be,

they will receive funds
to replace those items.

Well, this reform will
allow them to replace items

that they may have used as an entrepreneur

in a home business of some type.

And again, specialized
equipment can be anything from,

again, a screen reader,
all types of things

that I have in my home that
are related to my disability,

but also allow me to be productive.

So those things are not
included in the types

of things that funding can cover.

The next reform is a
simplified process for appeals.

Survivors who wish to appeal
FEMA decisions will no longer

need to provide a signed
written appeal letter

to accompany the supporting documentation.

This means that survivors
with disabilities

that often present with
complex applications

that typically made it more
likely to result in a denial

now have a new process

that makes it easier to satisfy
eligibility requirements

and connect to resources faster.

I do know that there
were questions revised

that better addressed the
question of disability.

It made it more clear
about what was being asked

than in previous applications.

But there are still those instances

where a survivor may have
a hard time understanding

what the question is really asking.

And if the question's answered wrong,

it can result in an appeal.

And that adds time to
that disaster journey,

as I talked about earlier,

that we're trying to shorten.

So the simplified process for appeals

will help alleviate that.

The last two reforms,

one is the removal of barriers
for late applications.

This eliminates the
requirement for survivors

to provide documentation
supporting the reason

for their late applications

to help those in need of extensions.

I like this because, as we know,

that a disaster itself makes it hard

for anybody to get access to things

like disaster recovery centers

or the application process
if the power's out.

And so there may be
legitimate reasons for anybody

to be delayed in getting
an application in.

But for people with
disabilities, it becomes tenfold

because not only do those
common barriers exist,

but other barriers exist.

Some could relate to pre-disaster

infrastructure inaccessibility.

It could just be the fact
that I'm stuck in my home,

'cause my wheelchair's damaged,

or I don't have any power

to power up my power assisted chair.

So those are added burdens that accrue

to people with disabilities

who may need longer time
to get an application in.

Well, this new reform
eliminates the requirement

to provide documentation,

proof that my damaged chair prevented me

from getting accessible transportation.

So I could reach a DRC,

I don't have to,

the burden is much lower to prove

why I was delayed access
to an application,

to the application process.

And then the last reform,
streamlined application

requirements will allow survivors to apply

to the Small Business Administration

and FEMA at the same time.

Let me unravel this a bit.

One of the barriers to
timely access to resources

used to be that you had
to apply for an SBA loan,

whether you had a small business or not,

but you had to apply for an SBA loan

and be denied before you were eligible

for certain FEMA benefits.

Don't ask me why,

I don't know why that was the case.

I'm sure Johnathan could
probably give us a good answer.

But the reality is now the requirement

to apply for an SBA loan

and be denied will no longer be the case.

So that is one of the,

probably the most common sense reforms

that you'll hear about on this list.

You no longer have to
apply for an SBA loan.

If you do have to apply for a loan,

because you are a business person,

that opportunity still remains available.

But for people who have
no small businesses,

you no longer have to do that
and go through that process

before getting the assistance
to begin your recovery.

So those are the reforms
that you'll see in essence

on the handout that was
posted in the chat room.

You know, it's gonna
hit people differently.

People emphasize different things in terms

of what they consider important.

But this is a pretty broad and
comprehensive set of reforms

that touch on many aspects
of the recovery cycle

that tend to prolong the cycle
longer than it needed to.

These reforms will take effect

once the 60 day public
comment period closes

on March 22nd, 2024.

The reason why that's the case

is because FEMA can't
just put out these reforms

without giving the public
an opportunity to weigh in.

So there will be a two month period.

I encourage you to take a
look at what I handed out,

consider some of the
things that I talked about,

maybe some questions I didn't answer

and send those questions
in to The Partnership

and give us time to work them through

what is a brand new process

that hasn't even taken an effect yet.

But we look forward to that
happening after March 22nd.

And I think it's worth
noting that these changes

do not affect the disaster recovery fund.

We heard a lot about that

during talks around the
government shutdown.

This will not be a rob
Peter to pay Paul situation

where you'll have more
support in some areas

because there's less in other areas.

This is a re-imagining

of how we provide support to people.

We made it more efficient,

it's got more flexibility,

and we thought about ways
to best streamline processes

that didn't need to be
as long as they were

or didn't need to be as involved

or have as many steps as they had.

So these offer us simply a new way

to assist impacted individuals, families,

and communities more efficiently.

And I look forward to,
not seeing more disasters,

but I do look forward to
when there is a disaster

being a part of the response

and making sure that these reforms

are working the way that they're intended.

So I'll stop there.

Johnathan, if you wanna
hop back on with me,

I'll open it up to any
questions that may be out there,

try to answer them or see if
Johnathan can answer them.

And if we can't, then we'll make sure

that we note and get back with you.

Someone's asking here,

will a call be available
to share in the future?

Meaning another session like this?

Is that what you're talking about?

Where's my chat button? There it is.

- [Shaylin] This is Shaylin.

I dunno if Chris also maybe means

if this call will be available
to share in the future.

And we are recording,

and we'll share out afterwards

as ongoing resource for everyone.

So yes to that.

- [Sherman] Other questions?

- [Germán] Couple of other questions.

One we were able to answer,

Julia Wats Belzer asked for the 14 points

of potential inequity document,

and we shared the publicly
available infographs type

of document.

And if there are future
conversations, Julia,

you'd like, we certainly can
connect you with Sherman.

Rosalita Radcliffe asked,

"What if this is a disaster event

for us as a person with a disability,

but not to the city municipality at large?

Are we still eligible for assistance?"

- [Sherman] Well, the way this
works is a state, a county,

not a county,

a state, a tribal
territory, a municipality

has to request FEMA assistance

in order to activate these,

not just these reforms,

but any FEMA assistance.

So a state, a tribal
territory, or municipality

has to request from the President

of the United States a declaration.

And that will begin the process of,

that will trigger the process

of providing resources to survivors.

So if you're a person with a disability

who is impacted in your own right,

separate from the broader area,

that won't be the trigger
for entitlement to these

or eligibility for these resources.

It has to come with a declaration,

and a declaration that
involves individual assistance.

And there are different declarations,

but it has to specifically
call for individual assistance.

- [Germán] This is Germán.

Thank you, Sherman.

Brianna Lenz asks, "What,
if any, are the changes

to the documentation requirements?"

- [Sherman] Well, in some cases where you,

I think I talked about that during the,

where there's a late application,

you had to provide proof
for why it was late.

Like you're not just somebody

who just sat on your hands and waited.

You actually have a reason.

And there was a requirement
to provide proof.

And now that's not gonna
be the requirement.

I also think that during
the appeals process,

it required an additional statement

that you don't have to provide this time.

You simply send in the
supporting documentation

that will satisfy what was asked for.

That doesn't need a statement.

So in many ways, it's just
really streamlining out some

of the things that were
redundant in the process,

probably because we still
want to keep, you know,

make sure that there's no
fraud and things like that.

But after reviewing a lot of this

and thinking through ways
to do this more efficiently,

those are just two examples
of where the process

is now more streamlined.

- [Johnathan] And Sherman,
if I could just jump in there

just as another example of

where we've reduced
documentation requirements

for survivors.

The first one is on our continued

temporary housing assistance application.

So we are, under the current regulations,

the survivor has to show documents

for their pre-disaster
income and expenses,

and then their post-disaster
income and expenses.

So we are eliminating the requirement

to have to provide pre-disaster documents.

So that cuts down on the paperwork burden

that survivors have to go
through to access those benefits.

And then, you know,
another really big change

that Sherman mentioned towards the end

that I wanna make sure we highlight

is that SBA dependent,

removing SBA dependent owner.

So when you talk about the documentation

and paperwork that survivors
have to go through that

to access assistance under IA,

they no longer have to go

through that SBA application process

to be considered for
personal property assistance

or transportation assistance

under the other needs
assistance category of IA.

So that's another area where we've

reduced the documentation
and burden on survivors.

- [Sherman] Thank you, Johnathan.

Mr. Reed asked a question
about the direct lease

and how it interacts with
the rental assistance.

Any thoughts on that, Johnathan?

I don't think that was
a part of the reforms,

but he asked it.

So is there anything we can offer?

- [Johnathan] Yes, it's
not part of the reforms

that were announced last Friday,

but the direct lease program falls

under like our direct housing assistance.

So those types of assistance get activated

when there aren't enough
available rental resources

for survivors to be able

to use their continued
rental assistance on.

And so in that case, one of
the types of direct assistance

where FEMA either brings in
temporary housing into an area,

whether that's manufactured
homes and travel trailers,

or it, you know,

makes use of resources that are available.

One of the ways we do
that is direct lease.

And so they can acquire,

we can contract directly with
property management companies

to get some of those resources

that may not be as easy for survivors

to access on their own
with financial assistance

and make them available
directly for survivors.

- [Sherman] Thank you, Johnathan,

any other questions?

- [Shaylin] This is Shaylin.

I wanna welcome anyone that,

anyone and especially folks that may not

be able to access the chat.

If you'd like to raise your hand

and voice your question, please feel free.

- [Sherman] And what will likely happen

is we'll have people who will have

to think through what they've heard.

This will be an ongoing conversation.

This will be an evolving conversation,

because the reform in
a policy is one thing,

but how it's put into
practice has to filter

through all the different
disasters we'll see,

all the different levels
of engagement we'll

have with stakeholders.

So we'll do our best to make it as simple,

and our explanation as the
reforms are in practice.

But they will bump up
against certain situations

that are always gonna
be unique and different

and require us to think through.

But we wanted to get you involved as early

as we could in this process,

because I was committed

to making sure if we do nothing else,

we have stakeholders at the table

as we're planning and doing
these types of changes.

So you all are at the table at this point,

and you can best help us by showing us

where there may be other areas

that require additional explanation.

- [Germán] This is Germán.

Thank you, Sherman.

Thank you, Johnathan.

And please express our appreciation

to the administrator.

It is great that she has put this forward,

and it can only help
people with disabilities

and everyone living in United States

that will be impacted by disaster

at some point have is
more streamlined approach

to the Individual Assistance program.

Ask questions beyond this call.

We'll surely communicate with your office

and share broadly with the community.

Jeff Eisman, you have your hand up?

- [Jeff] Yes, this is Jeff
Eisman from Pennsylvania Silk.

Just to be clear on what
you were saying earlier,

so if a state doesn't apply

for the emergency declaration,

none of these reforms would
be in effect, correct?

- [Sherman] That's correct,

the state isn't required to bring FEMA in.

Some states don't.

And if they have the wherewithal to do

what they need to do to
contain the emergency,

that's their obligation.

Only when they exceed their
ability to manage an emergency,

will that trigger a call
for assistance from FEMA

and everything that they
have within their own,

you know, body of resources,

that has nothing to do with these reforms.

That's what the state has decided.

That's what they'll give out.

But once FEMA's brought in,

then it triggers these reforms in cases

where individual assistance
is a part of the ask.

- [Jeff] Okay, so then does that mean

that not only does the state,

will the state have had to
sign off on the declaration?

Does FEMA have to be on the ground

before people can take
advantage of these reforms?

Or is the declaration sufficient then?

- [Sherman] A declaration isn't

gonna happen instantly, right?

There has to be a preliminary
damage assessment.

And by that time, if a
declaration is anticipated,

and it's gonna be
different with every case,

but if a declaration is anticipated,

you'll typically see
movement into the area.

- [Jeff] Okay, thank you.

- [Sherman] And I've been a part of

that movement several
times, so I know it happens,

but it would depend on the disaster

and the nature of it.

Some are, you know, Guam, Maui,

you know, Puerto Rico,

they're just all gonna be different.

So each one is gonna require
a different approach.

- [Germán] This is Germán.

And we are putting FEMA's how

the disaster gets declared fact sheet

in the chat for everyone.

- [Shaylin] We had a question,

a couple questions have come in.

This is Shaylin,

one from Christine Heiser
from Pennsylvania who asks

when the new individual assistance public

and policy guide will be available,

- [Sherman] That's not
a FEMA reform question.

That's an IA question I'll defer

to our folks down there who do that work.

- [Johnathan] This is
Johnathan, I can speak to it.

So I mean, we are going,

still planning on
releasing the next version

of our IAPPG probably in 2025,

mid to late 2025.

And so that's the next full
version that will include

all the policy amendments

that are made based on the regulation

and also some additional exchanges

that we're very happy to,

we're looking forward to.

- [Sherman] The question
about an MOU, you know,

that's outside of the,

you know, my competency

to weigh in on right now.

So I'll have to defer that one

to whoever's best equipped to do that,

I do see a comment here
from Angie Rivera Santiago

that says, "I look forward

to providing public comments
with The Partnership."

I have to tell you, as a citizen

who came into this work years ago,

those public comments,

they're not always gonna be
the thing that changes policy.

But I look at public
comments as an indication

of where either more opportunities lie.

There may be aspects of a problem

that we can take a look at.

So it's always great to have engagement,

not just with us,

but with every state and federal agency

that gives you an opportunity to weigh in,

'cause you never know where it'll lead.

Like I said, these reforms
were being discussed well

before they became reforms.

These conversations
were happening in 2021,

and it took a lot of
the administrator going

to disaster areas directly
engaging survivors,

hearing specifically from them
about what the issues were

that then flowered into these reforms.

But they couldn't have happened
without that engagement.

And so while engaging
survivors is one thing,

this is an opportunity for you to engage

with the process in a
non-disaster setting.

And I think somebody has a
question for you, Johnathan.

- [Johnathan] Yes, thank you.

It looks like Christopher
Hudak has a question on,

asking me to clarify
how disaster survivors

will need to apply for and qualify

for SBA physical damage loans.

So the rule doesn't change how the SBA

administers their loan program.

What we are changing as part
of this regulatory reform

is requiring survivors to go
through an SBA loan process

before they're considered for some types

of a FEMA assistance.

So survivors will still
be able to go through,

you know, to SBA and apply for a loan.

The SBA has kind of a phone number

that survivors can call.

SBA will still be in the
disaster recovery centers

with us as a partner,

supporting communities
recover from disasters.

But all this rule does is change,

get rid of the requirement for a survivor

to go through that SBA process

before they're considered
for FEMA benefits.

- [Sherman] Thank you, it looks
like Alexandra Enders ask,

"Will the reforms be implemented

before the new IA document?"

And she's talking about the
individual assistance program

and policy guide is released in 2025.

That's two separate things.

These reforms will be in effect

for the first disaster

after the March 22nd
comment period closes,

the closure of the comment period,

which closes on March 22nd.

And again, we couldn't do these right now

because the public has to have
an opportunity to weigh in.

So there's no retroactive effect.

The first disaster after March 22nd

on or after March 22nd
will be the disaster

where we'll see these reforms take effect.

- [Johnathan] So just one
and Sherman's correct.

These will take effect after the,

for the first disaster
in IA that's declared

after that March 22nd implementation date.

But the comment period for the IFR,

we actually are keeping
it open for 180 days.

- [Sherman] Okay.

- [Johnathan] So the, yeah,

so the public will have
additional opportunity

to comment even after
the rule is effective.

- [Sherman] Thank you,
this is a fluid situation,

so I'm having to be as Semper
Gumby as I've ever been,

but thank you for that, Johnathan.

Other questions?

- [Shaylin] Laura?

- [Laura] Let me find
my little hand thing.

This is Laura (indistinct) speaking

from the state of Delaware.

And this question may be more

towards Johnathan's wheelhouse,

but we are updating our mass
care plan here in Delaware

and there is sections regarding IA.

So within these reforms,

it was discussed that there
were some reforms specific

to safe, sanitary water,
maybe specialized diets,

but is there a component of AI

that speaks directly to feeding?

Because we have a separate section

for feeding in our mass care plan,

and we were posed with talking

about individual assistance in feeding.

So beyond these reforms,

is there a feeding components?

I'm familiar with D-SNP

and some department of
agricultural programs

that can be accessed,

but is there anything else under AI

when it comes to mass feeding?

- [Johnathan] Well, I think within IA

what you would be looking for is our,

we also have a lot of the
emergency support function six

responsibilities under the
national response framework.

And so much of that
operational coordination

and technical assistance from IA

comes within our mass
care community services

and voluntary coordination branch.

I think the mass care folks,

and they have some doctrine and literature

about evacuee support, feeding operations,

and that's just a little bit outside

of my wheelhouse within the individuals

and households program space,

but I think we could get
you connected with some

of those folks if that'd be helpful.

- [Laura] Great, but with these
reforms, there are specific,

if I'm,

I was taking notes when
Sherman was talking

about specialized diets

or costs of things like that
for survivors with access

and functional needs.
- [Johnathan] Yeah, so-

- [Sherman] I'll touch on that.

I brought that up within
the context of individuals

who may be in their homes

and they lost power, for example.

So all their perishable
items rotted or are no good.

And if you've got a situation
where you need to have,

like, you can't go to a shelter

and get whatever's being served there,

because you have a special diet,

you have some funding
to purchase those items

if you need to.

I don't imagine there will
be a lot of stores open

and things like that,
but there are situations

in tornado hit areas where
the damage is significant,

but it's enough to stay in the home,

but you still gotta make
it to a CVS to buy things

that you can't get at a shelter

or a disaster recovery center.

So it just gives you
another option to tend

to your unique or special needs

that may not be meetable
through what's been set up

in that community.

So I was just, that's
just one hypothetical.

- [Laura] Okay.

- [Sherman] Having the
additional money upfront

might serve people with disabilities

who have specific needs that
can't be met immediately

through the disaster response
apparatus in the community.

- [Laura] Thank you
for that clarification.

And does that fall under the
serious needs assistance?

Is that where that lives?

- [Sherman] That funding
that you now have available

will be where ideally
you have more options

and more control over
accessing those things, yes.

- [Laura] Great, thank you so much.

- [Sherman] You're welcome.

Other questions?

Well, you'll have plenty of
time to think about what,

you know, other questions that come up.

Like I said to the leadership
here at The Partnership

will be available to answer questions

if we have to do a session,

maybe a few weeks from now with updates,

that may be necessary.

But we're here to make sure
that you feel empowered

by understanding these reforms,

so that you can become
ambassadors for talking about them

to your respective constituents

if you represent an organization,

because we want people to know about this.

- [Shaylin] This is Shaylin,

and thank you so much
Sherman and Johnathan

and everyone at FEMA for
coming together with us today

to make sure this
information is getting out

to the disability community far and wide.

And now I know all of these folks,

we had over 200 people
throughout the call time,

throughout this hour jumping in and out.

So what a great turnout to
see everyone coming together

to learn more and to certainly
share within our networks

and within our local communities

and starting to educate our community.

So thank you all for that.

I will also add in the chat as we,

sorry, put myself on mute.

We'll add in the chat as we certainly

will send out the recording following this

in the coming week,

as well as the additional
materials we have shared

in the chat and that
have gone out for folks.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to us

in between if questions do come up.

We at The Partnership do

hold weekly national
stakeholder calls every Tuesday

at 3:00 PM Eastern Time

using the same link.

And folks can feel free to sign up

for that LISTSERV in the link in the chat,

also on our website at
disasterstrategies.org

where we often come together around issues

and topics related to
people with disabilities

and disasters and emergencies.

And certainly this topic

of FEMA's individual assistance reform

will continue to be a topic there as well.

So please join us,

please sign up for that LISTSERV

for other updates from us.

And certainly don't hesitate
to reach out in between.

Any other last questions
that have come in?

We'll take a quick look through the chat,

just seeing lots of thank you's

and folks sharing their information.

Well, I think we can maybe

give five minutes back to folks today,

unless there's any last
question folks may like to ask.

- [Sherman] I'll just take
a moment to say thank you

to Germán and Shaylin for
giving us an opportunity

to bring stakeholders into, you know,

these types of discussions

that are pretty critical to their lives.

And Johnathan, thank you
for coming in to back me up.

I was never gonna be the guru of this,

but I did wanna make sure

that we open this discussion broadly,

so that people can digest it, process it,

and then come up with other ways

that we can talk about this
within your respective,

their lanes or constituent groups.

- [Johnathan] Yeah, thank
you for the opportunity

to help you out, appreciate it.

- [Sherman] All right,
be safe for everyone.

- [Shaylin] Thank you, everyone.

Stay safe, take care.

And please don't hesitate
to reach out in between.

Thank you, Sherman and Johnathan.

- [Sherman] Thank you.