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# **National Council on Disability**

# **Quarterly Board Meeting**

## August 29, 2025

## 9:30 a.m. – 12:15 p.m. ET

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## **NCD Quarterly Meeting**

## **August 29, 2025**

## **9:30 a.m.**

NICK SABULA: I'm going to start the meeting. Give it about two minutes, and when you hear "recording started," we will proceed.

SHAWN KENNEMER: Are we good?

[Recording in progress]

SHAWN KENNEMER: Are we good?

All right. Welcome to Day 2.

Stacey, will you take the roll of the Council members, please.

STACEY BROWN: Yes, Chairman.

Vice Chair Kennemer.

SHAWN KENNEMER: Here.

STACEY BROWN: Hoskie Benally, Jr.

Sascha Bittner.

SASCHA BITTNER: Here.

STACEY BROWN: Theo Braddy.

THEO BRADDY: Here.

STACEY BROWN: Kim Ridley.

KIM RIDLEY: Here.

STACEY BROWN: Risa Rifkind.

RISA RIFKIND: Here.

STACEY BROWN: Neil Romano.

NEIL ROMANO: Present.

STACEY BROWN: Staff, Joan Durocher.

JOAN DUROCHER: Here.

STACEY BROWN: Kimie Eacobacci.

KIMIE EACOBACCI: Here.

STACEY BROWN: Netterie Lewis.

Netterie Lewis?

Anne Sommers McIntosh.

ANNE SOMMERS McINTOSH: Here.

STACEY BROWN: Amy Nicholas.

ANA TORRES-DAVIS: Amy's here.

STACEY BROWN: Yes.

Nick Sabula.

NICK SABULA: Here.

STACEY BROWN: Amged Soliman.

AMGED SOLIMAN: Here.

STACEY BROWN: Ana Torres-Davis.

ANA TORRES-DAVIS: Here.

STACEY BROWN: Keith Woods.

KEITH WOODS: Here.

STACEY BROWN: I yield the floor back to you, Chair Kennemer.

SHAWN KENNEMER: Thank you, Stacey.

To begin Day 2 of the meeting, I will call on myself for the Chairman's report.

I want to start the Chairman's report with acknowledging the staff at the National Council. Without them, we can't do our truly good work that we do here in advising the federal government on issues related to people with disabilities.

We have an impressive team of professionals that work for the Council. They are quite the steam engine that drives everything that we do.

Although they're small, many of our staffs have hit major milestones in federal public service. So today I want to recognize their accomplishments and read their names out loud, along with their years of service.

So I'll start with Keith Woods and Jed. How do you say your name, Jed?

AMGED SOLIMAN: Amged.

SHAWN KENNEMER: 10 years of federal service in 2026. They will have achieved to 10 years of service.

Amy Nicholas will have 11 years of service.

Anne Sommers McIntosh will reach 17 years of federal service in November.

Ana Torres-Davis will have 18 years of federal service this September.

Netterie Lewis will have 22 years of federal service.

And Joan Durocher will have 30 years of federal service.

So I want to thank you all for your public service, particularly for your support of NCD on behalf of the people with disabilities in the United States.

So it's also come to my attention that there is one more member of NCD whose tenure has far surpassed any others. And that's Stacey Brown.

Stacey, will you join me up front here?

[Applause]

Yea, Stacey.

So let me get through this real quick, Stacey. Hold on.

Stacey Brown is NCD's staff assistant and started when he was just 19. No, get over here. Tell me if I'm wrong. Started his federal service at 19 with the U.S. Access Board. It was actually the sister agency of the National Council on Disability, and we're actually in their conference room right now.

Stacey first worked for the U.S. Access Board, then came to work for NCD. Then he left us for a brief period and went to work for the Board of International Broadcasting, then came back to us again before the ADA was signed into law.

So this July, Stacey reached his 40 years of service in the federal government. I'm calling out your age.

[Laughter]

And we are so happy to be the beneficiary of this commitment to the American public. And for that, we thank you so much, Stacey, for your 40 years of service.

And we have -- apparently I did not know this. But this is your certificate for you to hang in the front office here, and with all of your service pins from the federal government. It's my honor to say thank you.

STACEY BROWN: Thank you.

SASCHA BITTNER: Yea.

[Applause]

SHAWN KENNEMER: Thank you so much.

THEO BRADDY: Congratulations.

STACEY BROWN: Yes. Thank you so much. Thank you.

SASCHA BITTNER: Congratulations.

SHAWN KENNEMER: So I will -- that's the great thing I get to do as the Chairman. If you never ever wanted to be in this position, it's such a great honor to do this and be able to do this for the staff.

Stacey will be the first one if you ever come to the national council office that you will see. He always has a smile that I know. Others may say differently. I don't know. But I've always seen him with a smile.

So with that, we're going to move on to -- well, so Council Members' reports. So still part of the Chairman's.

So I'll just talk a little bit about what I've done in the last -- what's it been, 3 months? Time is going so fast.

So I have actually attended several discussions in the state of California about the ongoing DSP crisis that we're having and facing and the lack of funding in the state of California as well as I've been in New Orleans for the Arc national conference, addressing the needs and concerns at the national level.

And then in August -- I'm sorry, in the last -- for the ADA celebration, in July, I actually had the opportunity to speak at the Health and Human Services 30th anniversary celebration. While there, we actually reached out in the 2 minutes that you have to introduce yourself to the Secretary of Health and Human Services, I actually brought up the fact that the National Council needs to be present and have a seat at the Make America Healthy Again table. And he seemed very -- and I had mentioned that we had written a letter to him a few months prior, and he actually wanted us to reach back out, which we have done as well.

So always trying to bring us to the forefront and taking every opportunity.

I think that's surprising because I think he just wanted greetings, and I was like, we need to be here.

So that's my report. And I will go in order of -- I'll start this way.

Miss Risa, will you share your report?

RISA RIFKIND: Thank you. You always start with me.

NEIL ROMANO: Going in order but skipping Neil.

SHAWN KENNEMER: There's no slight.

RISA RIFKIND: Yes. So over the last several months, I've been hearing a lot of -- I sound like a broken record, but continued concerns from the community, especially in the months that have happened since we last met around decisions around Medicaid and budget. And again, it's something that I hope the Council will continue to watch and be in discussion about with the community.

That really has been what I have heard a lot. It was a pretty interesting 35th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act I feel like in the community. Just recognition of in the moment of celebration, it's also a moment of concern, and really thinking what this needs to look like and hoping that disability inclusion continues to be at the forefront and not just not thought of, but not undone.

So I will leave it at that.

SHAWN KENNEMER: Thank you, Risa.

Okay, Neil. I didn't skip you.

NEIL ROMANO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

As we probably most of us know, next month October -- October, not next -- is National Disability Employment Awareness Month, NDEAM. And I've had the pleasure along with the Professional Baseball Athletic Trainers Society to be working with ODEP as they plan this celebration, as they plan for that month. It's a pretty -- well, certainly Major League Baseball is very honored to be allowed to be part of that.

That goes back to historically years of working with the Professional Baseball Athletic Trainers Society and ODEP who have had an agreement now for 12 years. Longest single group. And that has over the years we've done a series of television commercials that included pieces with Jim Abbott, a one-handed pitcher, and so on.

The whole concept of the relationship was to develop the concept that people with disabilities are valuable and useful and can compete in any field they choose to, given the opportunity, and certainly have something like an exclusive sport as difficult as Major League Baseball and realize there are dozens and dozens of people with disabilities who have played the game. We can go through some of them. We've had people who were legally blind and played. We've had people with one arm. And on and on throughout the game and have really shown up. I mean, didn't just take a day on the field but became great ball players.

So we're very pleased to be working on that. We expect there's going to be a series of events that are also going to include baseball. And that's one of the things that I've been working on.

SHAWN KENNEMER: Awesome. Thank you. Thank you.

Theo.

THEO BRADDY: Yes, thank you. I would love to be able to report on something positive, but, you know, a lot of stuff is coming at us. As Executive Director of the National Council on Independent Living, a lot of stuff about membership. Right now the biggest thing I'm hearing is dealing with homelessness and mental illnesses. Very concerned that that is going to impact people with disabilities. Right? You know a lot of homeless people in regards to being identified not only homelessness but they have disabilities. And we are concerned that this is one step moving toward reinstitutionalization. So I'm hoping that people will pay attention to that. I'm hoping not only NCIL, National Council on Disability, recognizing that people affected by that Executive Order will be people with intellectual disabilities, mental illnesses, autism, and so forth. We have worked very hard to be in the community, against institutional bias, and we don't want to go back to that.

So just wanted to make you all aware of that. Thank you.

SHAWN KENNEMER: Thank you.

Kimberly.

KIM RIDLEY: Thank you.

Theo, I want to echo first what you said in New York. We are hearing a lot about that Executive Order. My staff in New York have a particular concern that it's truly beginning to roll back Olmstead. So a lot of fear with the budget cuts coming down. Since I'm fortunate enough to work in the executive chamber, we're in the beginning stages of incoming issues in New York right now. As we're developing proposals for our Governor, we're continuing to hear housing, employment challenges.

Building on the crisis in California, it's absolutely happening in New York. PAs, aides, with the workforce crisis, it's a significant barrier and one we see continue.

And Neil, I'm looking forward to NDEAM. New York has taken NDEAM and we've turned it into our DREAM symposium so that during the employment awareness month festivities, we also talk about the rights of people with disabilities and how when we have significant issues, that really prohibits us. So as we move forward with this symposium every year, we talk about all the accomplishments and so on and so forth.

Thank you.

SHAWN KENNEMER: Thank you.

Sascha, do you have a report?

SASCHA BITTNER: Yes. A lot of people have talked about this. I was actually honored in San Francisco to be a part of the ADA celebration. It was really nice. The community is so worried about the Medicaid cuts and how that will affect California. California is doing everything they can to protect people, but it's still going to be incredibly awful.

We've been hearing a lot about that. And people getting out of bed don't have personal assistants and they're worried about that.

I believe there are positive things through the disability center. I got to go to a grand opening, and it was really nice.

And I'm done.

SHAWN KENNEMER: Okay. Sascha, we appreciate your report.

Is Hoskie on the phone?

ANNE SOMMERS McINTOSH: We are in the process of trying to get Hoskie in a situation where he'll be unmuted.

SHAWN KENNEMER: Okay. When that happens --

HOSKIE BENALLY: I'm here.

SHAWN KENNEMER: Yes. All right. Okay. Hoskie, your report, please.

HOSKIE BENALLY: (Chuckling) Okay. Good morning, everybody. We have two things going on here in Indian country in regards to disabilities. The first one is the Navajo Nation is going to have its 50th anniversary celebration and providing VR services. We started back in 1975, and so this is our 50th anniversary and we're going to have a celebration on October 29th in Flagstaff, and we're bringing in people that were very much involved in how far we've come today in providing VR services.

I was one of the first VR counselors back in 1977. So that's what we're going to be doing.

The other thing is, we are planning a disability symposium here, and the dates for that -- this will be virtual, and it's going to be on November 7th and the 14th. And what we're doing is some of you probably can recall that we had the survey that we did in providing asking individuals with disabilities who are Native American about their status and some of the challenges they were having. And this came out of the Inter-Tribal Disability Advocacy Council report that would presented to NCD probably about a year ago or so.

So now we're taking off from that, and we're going to have this symposium. It's going to be organizations that serve people with disabilities that are indigenous. What we're going to do is we have three areas that we're looking at. That's going to be welfare and health. So we're putting together this symposium and inviting American Indian disability organizations to do presentations, talk about what their services are, and then also tell us about what the barriers and service gaps that they're experiencing and their recommendations for funding and policy changes.

So we're putting all that together now. And out of that, we'll also have a report coming from those organizations that will participate.

The other thing is a question from indigenous country is that why is not NCD coming out and doing their quarterly meetings here in the west like Salt Lake, Denver, Phoenix area. We're just wondering why it's always east. So that's the other thing.

So that's my report. Thank you.

SHAWN KENNEMER: Thank you, Hoskie.

Yes, we will address that next year. We -- I -- we believe we need to get out to the west coast as well. So we're just waiting on some other information to come through before we decide where exactly we're going to go, but I really appreciate your report, Hoskie.

Okay. So with that, we are going to move to our Executive Committee reports. We'll start with Sascha and Joan.

JOAN DUROCHER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Sascha has asked me to give the report for the governance committee. She is the Chair of the governance committee.

Let's see here.

The current bylaws require NCD to provide for a public comment period at its meetings.

Over time we have had challenges implementing this provision due to technical difficulties with virtual platforms, e.g., the inability to control whether commenters who register will actually provide comment at the meeting, and the challenge of controlling comments by malicious actors. Overall, it has not been a smooth or informative activity and it is the weakest part of NCD's information gathering for its reports. Staff took on the challenge of looking at this and coming up with ideas to improve the public comment process.

The Chair, Sascha, and the staff support the plan that they have proposed.

First, the bylaws would have to be amended to allow for public comments during meetings but not requiring a public comment period. In other words, the change will not prohibit us from having public comment periods at NCD meetings, but it will not require us to do so.

To make this improvement, a couple of sentences in our bylaws would have to be changed.

First, delete "Public Comment" from page 30. This is all in your notebook material.

Second, on page 31, to change the sentence, "The Chairperson (or designee) will conduct a public comment session at each scheduled meeting of the Council."

Proposed change - "The Chairperson may provide the opportunity for public comment related to the policy topics on the Council's agenda for each scheduled meeting of the Council."

Last, removing the sentence, "The Chairperson may limit the time for comment based upon number or requests or the length of the planned agenda."

Along with this bylaw change, to improve our ability to obtain public comments, NCD staff will implement a three-prong strategy:

Prong 1: After the Council votes to approve policy priorities, if appropriate for the project, staff will prepare a formal Request for Information (RFI) for publication in the Federal Register. This will have broad reach and raise public awareness of our priorities and the gravity of the issues we are examining. The information gathered will help make our staff some of the most informed federal advisors on these topics, and provide increased sources to support our reports and final recommendations.

Nick will then post announcements on social media about NCD's RFI.

Prong 2: Staff will identify opportunities to conduct town hall sessions at disability related conferences and will facilitate town halls to gather information on our policy priorities throughout the year to the greatest extent possible.

Prong 3: NCD will maintain its public comment webpage to accept submissions 24/7. This page contains a description of each project and questions for the public.

Nick will post announcements on social media about NCD's current opportunities for public comment on a set schedule to keep people informed and increased traffic to our website.

With the information that we gather through these avenues, at each Council meeting (if appropriate), an NCD staff member will provide the Council with the amount of comments received with general observations about what they include.

Staff and the Chair believe that this approach to gathering public comment in a threefold manner will substantially improve the public comment part of our work.

That is the change that we're all kind of hoping to make, but the Council, when you make a change to the bylaws at the Council, the Council needs to vote on those changes in whole and at an open council meeting.

So I will turn it back to the Chairman now to perhaps call for a vote or talk about it any further.

SHAWN KENNEMER: Right. So we did have sent this out to the Council for discussion through email.

Is there any comments or discussion from the Council Members on this area that you would like to have now?

RISA RIFKIND: I just have a question. This is Risa. I think that, can you clarify, I have a question about whether or not the bylaw change happens, the strategy of what you call prong 1, 2, and 3, are really good ideas. Would they happen regardless of the change to the bylaws?

JOAN DUROCHER: That is a good question. And yeah. We've actually started to get all of this underway regardless. But I think we're going to do this anyway. But the bylaw change, the essential piece that's changing and why we need to make that change in the bylaws is that we might not necessarily going forward have public comment at these Council meetings and that's the change that needs to be approved by the full Council. You can if you want to, but you can also cut it out but up to this point it's been a required part of every Council meeting.

SHAWN KENNEMER: Remind me if I'm wrong. I believe the reason that we're changing this also is because of the technology and the resources needed when we travel for Council meetings and trying to get that connectivity is ultimately very expensive to do that. And we're limited here. We've been tasked by the White House to cut costs anywhere we can. And when we're talking limited, it's like thousands and thousands of dollars each time we travel.

So the goal is not to prevent public comments, but in order to facilitate this, we have to change the bylaws. I would suggest no Chair is going to stop public comments. That's not what we're after.

Is that correct?

ANA TORRES-DAVIS: The idea behind this too was that we often have -- we have had so much difficulty with controlling how we can accept public comment. We've actually had a lot of malicious actors that we've had to guard against. People have made very negative comments, and we've had to have someone man the computer of course to stop that from reaching everybody.

There are challenges just in getting people in the room sometimes.

And so like we're saying, it's not that we can't have it, but it does give us an opportunity that if we're in the situation where we're in a place where people can't get to us or having other issues technologically, we can use all of these other options to continue getting really robust public comment.

And I think the RFI idea is a fantastic idea. It's not an idea that we have worked with before. It is a formal request for information that goes in the Federal Register. It will go to everybody. And we will be able to get information from researchers and academics and the community and we'll publish it and we'll really use that as a way to form our reports.

Because a lot of what our public comment does is inform our reports. We had a lot of good success with the ground transportation report. A lot of people showed up for public comment. But we don't often get that at meetings. So we're just trying to grow that option a little bit.

SHAWN KENNEMER: Neil?

NEIL ROMANO: I just wanted to ask about it. It says in there that Joan, the Chairman will get to make a decision as to whether or not we're going to do this.

Is this something that he obviously needs to do in advance if it's going to be electronic, but if it's not electronic and we have an audience, let's say a significant audience from a particular city, can he on the fly then say, I would like to open it up for comments of the audience? Or does it have to be prescribed in advance?

JOAN DUROCHER: Absolutely. The bylaws won't change the ability of the Chairman to open up for public comments at all.

SHAWN KENNEMER: Any other discussion?

RISA RIFKIND: This is Risa. I think what makes me a little nervous is that it seems like we're removing the requirement of public comment and leaving it so open-ended. Is there a way to require public comment in some form? I understand the concerns about meetings, but like your other strategies of opening it up for more forms of public comment, but that's not a requirement with the bylaw change. And I think that is tricky because I think what is so needed for the Council to have is direct connection to the community and making that optional I think undoes a lot of what we stand for.

ANA TORRES-DAVIS: Again, it's up to obviously, and I think that we're trying to kind of give us more flexibility but also to give us a greater breadth of public comments from more people. But I do understand your concerns, and I hear you.

RISA RIFKIND: I'm not talking about anyone specifically, Chair. Right, but like thinking bylaw changes are long standing, right, so... sorry.

SHAWN KENNEMER: Sascha, did you have a comment?

SASCHA BITTNER: Yeah. I wonder if we could put something in about public comments as a way so we can make it very clear that we will be doing -- we would still be soliciting the public's advice, but I do get what Risa is saying about we don't want to make it seem like we don't want the public's involvement. So something about making it very clear that that it will be solicited in other avenues.

Did you get what I said?

SHAWN KENNEMER: Yeah. Yes, absolutely.

I think as the Chair, I'm going to table this for the next meeting, and we'll open back up more discussion email by the Council, because there seems to be some verbiage that Council Members want to see, and I think it would be better that we take this offline.

SASCHA BITTNER: And I can help you with like wording.

SHAWN KENNEMER: Thank you.

Neil?

NEIL ROMANO: Joan, if you don't mind, in the interim, can you let us know if it's statutorily required for us to have public comment and if we have some kind of a history?

I've been here pretty long. I should be getting one of those 40-year pins. But I remember there was a point we didn't have public comment. And I remember we then did. Then I remember it was truncated. Then I remember it was long.

And let me just say, you know, in agreement with this change, I mean, sometimes that public comment is excruciating. And I say that in the nicest manner. We've had problems. You know, I think that letting people know, I love going through the congressional record. You can only ask so much.

But that I think would also put us more in alignment with other agencies because other agencies don't have public comment. They put out an ask for comment. So that would be I think that would be -- I just need to know statutorily, does it say that NCD has to do and we have a hard and fast? That would help us.

If it's a no, then I think the change is obviously to the bylaws would be very acceptable.

JOAN DUROCHER: The current bylaws require it, but statute does not.

NEIL ROMANO: It's not statutory.

JOAN DUROCHER: No.

NEIL ROMANO: That answers it.

SHAWN KENNEMER: I think what everybody is agreeing is, we agree with public comment. Maybe the statutory, maybe the change, and we'll go back and revisit that, could be at the discretion of the Chair as to what form that takes, whether live or in public, but it has to occur in some way.

NEIL ROMANO: And doing it that way, it also gives the Chair the opportunity to be pointed in what we want. I mean, I have seen public comment here sometimes, guys, that, you know, that is kind of a heaven to hell, people come in and talk about their children, which God bless them, they're certainly entitled to vent. But the fact of the matter is, when we're like focusing on something like transportation or focusing -- that's the value to the Council. Although venting sometimes is also emotionally good for us to hear and remember there are real human beings out there.

But, you know, I just think it helps focus us. At the end of the meetings, I have looked at some of my colleagues' eyes glazing over and we're thinking about our flights.

SHAWN KENNEMER: Yes. No, thank you for the Council. I really appreciate the conversation, and I think we'll table this and then revisit it maybe at our next meeting, but get some more comment and let's try to work that language a little bit different.

JOAN DUROCHER: Sure.

SHAWN KENNEMER: Okay?

Thank you.

We're next, our next panel -- not panel.

Our next committee report is the financial report which is Keith. We're going to ask you to give the financial report of the Council, please.

KEITH WOODS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SHAWN KENNEMER: Mic.

KEITH WOODS: I apologize. Can you hear me now?

The National Council on Disability is currently undergoing our fiscal year 2024 and 2025 biannual audit. In this audit, the auditors evaluate the strength of our internal controls, and review samples from payroll, payables, journal entries, personnel actions, and timesheet submissions.

Our audit started in July and is scheduled to finish in mid-November. Everything is proceeding smoothly, and we are on track to complete the audit on time. So far, we have no findings.

The status of funds is reported up to July 31, 2025.

Our total budget is $3,850,000 and we have spent 70% of it to date.

We have already set aside funds for building renovations, furniture, replenishing the GPO account, and the ATO assessment. As of today, we still have an additional $120,000 to spend by the end of the year.

This concludes my report.

Do you have any questions?

SHAWN KENNEMER: Council Members, any questions?

THEO BRADDY: Theo. Real quick here. Do you have any thoughts on how the 120,000 by the end of the year will be spent?

SHAWN KENNEMER: I will briefly answer that and turn it to Ana. We have been talking about we have this -- there are some technology equipment for meetings that we could do in house and not have to outsource stuff that we're talking about.

There is some technology issues inside the office that they're needing some more computers because their technology is getting pretty old.

So I think we're looking for ideas too, Ana, is that...?

ANA TORRES-DAVIS: As Keith was describing, we've identified several areas where we could use some of these funds.

One of the issues that we have faced this year is that when we left during COVID, we gave away a lot of our real estate footprint. And so an office that used to house all of our staff now cannot house our staff. And so we have looked at working with GSA to create some work spaces in there so that we can fit and come into the office.

So that is one of the areas where we're looking to spend some of this money.

And then to improve some of the old kind of broken or beat up furniture that we have, some of the equipment.

And what else was it, Keith?

KEITH WOODS: The GPO replenishment and the ATO assessment.

ANA TORRES-DAVIS: Maybe you can tell them what that is.

KEITH WOODS: So we're required to have an ATO, authority to operate, on other government sites. That's when we go to like FAA and get our finance reports, we can run it.

And we're going through the ATO right now. But assessor has to come in and assess the work to make sure before we can actually get certified.

SHAWN KENNEMER: So we're talking about getting some certifications? Is that --

KEITH WOODS: ATO so we can go to other government sites.

SHAWN KENNEMER: Okay. Which would allow to us do more reports, correct? Talk to us on the Council as though we don't know how this government operates.

ANA TORRES-DAVIS: Well, you know, every year the federal government agencies face this issue. You know, you have some money. You try to spend it responsibly. You try to identify things that you need. And that's what we're going through now. But we have been going through this for several months. We've been discussing this for several months trying to figure out what is the best way, what is the most responsible way, what is the most cost efficient way, and I think we're doing a really good job on that. Right now we're just trying to solidify all of that and make sure that we can designate those funds as needed.

SHAWN KENNEMER: Right. And one of the concerns -- I mean, so little history. Under the previous Administration, there was no return to work. And we will actually tasked with downsizing the office space. So if you've ever been in the office, if you haven't been in the back corner, like half, I would say almost half or more than half of the office space was given up. There's still no wall there, nobody is occupying it, but in talking with bringing everybody back into the office will require to us expand. But we're still facing Executive Orders of, well, you can't increase your building.

Now, I believe the Executive Order says unless it's determined necessary to bring people back. So or there is one office that we're probably going to reabsorb and grow probably I think it's only about 300, 400 square feet maybe, additional, if that, and then building out work spaces. Especially in some areas so that everybody can get back to the office. So -- but we're also tasked with being very fiscally responsible with the money. And so we're not just going to blow money if we have it just to spend it.

But in just the short time I've been in the Acting Chair position, looking at it, I'm like, how are you guys operating with some of your equipment that's ages and ages old. So I think we have to get up to the times as well.

Is there any other comments?

Okay. Hearing none, do I have -- yes, thank you. My brain just went blank. I'm on California time.

Sascha and Risa, we're all dying right here.

SASCHA BITTNER: Yeah.

SHAWN KENNEMER: So yes, do I have a motion to approve the financials?

SASCHA BITTNER: I move.

THEO BRADDY: Second.

SHAWN KENNEMER: Sascha moves and Theo seconds.

Any further discussion?

Hearing none, all in favor say aye.

Do we need to do a roll call? I don't think so.

All right. Awesome. So that carries.

Thank you, Keith, for your report.

And then we are now to our panel. Amy, would you come up and introduce the panel? And Amy will be our facilitator for this panel.

AMY NICHOLAS: You ready?

Good morning, everyone. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity.

Before I get started, I would be remiss in acknowledging that today is the 20th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, and all of us know the devastation that was rained on New Orleans and the devastation to the disability community during that horrible storm. It's frustrating and agonizing that we're here 20 years later talking about many of the same issues that we have been advocating for for the last 20 years. But I'm very pleased and excited to have our panel here.

Taking a different approach than what NCD normally does, we normally look at the emergency management on the federal level.

Back in May, our Council voted on our 2026 project to be a tool kit specifically addressing states' issues and what states need as well as local municipalities in order to create and implement a functional emergency management plan that's inclusive of people with disabilities.

So my panelists today are phenomenal.

I'm having mic issues too, Ana.

My panelists today are phenomenal people who are going to help me help guide us as to what needs to be included in that tool kit.

We've seen an increase in disasters over the last several years. We have seen an increase in extreme weather events over the last several years. We've also seen disasters occurring in locations that we used to see as safe areas. Case in point last year is Hurricane Helene and Milton in Asheville, North Carolina.

So unfortunately predictions are that extreme weather events are going to increase in number. And as we know, they can occur anywhere: Every state, every county, every territory and tribal nation needs to have an emergency management program and a policy that is inclusive of people with disabilities. So when another disaster hits in an area like Asheville, the local emergency operators have the required tools to efficiently care for all community members, including people with disabilities.

Over the last two decades we've written multiple reports on emergency management, providing recommendations to federal and state entities. The majority of those recommendations were focused on the coordination and collaboration at a federal level. As I mentioned earlier, this panel and the tool kit is taking a different approach. So I'm excited about that.

So today's discussion, we are going to talk about and touch on promising practices and programs, training and procedures that have improved the outcome of people with disabilities before, during, and after disasters. All of the panelists have different programs and strategies that they have honed, and I look forward to their discussion.

Our first panelist, Natasha Fox, is the chief resilience officer with the Oregon Department of Emergency Management.

Natasha integrates the OEM's diversity, equity, and accessibility planning. She collaborates with communities and advisory councils, which clear the path for public input and feedback. She also works directly with communities to develop culturally responsive and locally relevant resilient strategies.

Natasha, I'm grateful you're here today. It was a long journey for you. She's also a west coaster, so she's hurting this morning. So I hand it over to you.

NATASHA FOX: Thank you so much.

There it is. Thank you so much. Thank you, Amy. Thank you, Chairperson, and thank you Council Members.

SHAWN KENNEMER: I'm just going to remind everybody, about 6 inches from your mouth and project. That's what I've been asked for the ASL interpreters.

NATASHA FOX: Copy that. Thank you.

Thank you, Chairperson, and thank you, Council Members, for the great honor of being able to speak with you this morning.

In Oregon, where I am chief resilience officer at Oregon Department of Emergency Management, we are working to ensure that accessibility is fully integrated into strategic planning and operational objectives for how we plan, train, exercise, and respond to and recover from disaster.

That begins with introducing disability and accessibility competency into the culture of our agency itself. To do that, we hold semimonthly trainings for all of our 130-person staff on topics such as understanding foundational laws that guide accessible emergency management; using CMIS and applying its principles throughout the disaster cycle; how to hold accessible virtual meetings and social media engagements; creating accessible documents and outreach materials in multiple languages and formats, and that are compatible with assistive devices. We continuously develop and define accessible outreach and engagement practices in our public-facing events and in public information, and we collaborate closely with our training and exercise section to set objectives that directly improve outcomes for people with disabilities and access and functional needs.

We also focus on integration and coordination with the disability community itself. We continue to develop formal pathways for input from nonprofits, centers for independent living, state and local councils, such as the Oregon Disabilities Commission, and community partners across our state so that people with lived experience can shape how we design programs, plans, and policies.

This is most critical when it comes to developing and sustaining equitable evacuation and sheltering practices. When the state emergency coordination center activates in an emergency, an equity officer embedded in the emergency coordination center command structure whose position encompasses disability and access and functional needs support serves as the lead adviser and subject matter expert to identify gaps, guide decision making, and ensure accessibility and equity are integrated into every aspect of the operation, including in the development of operational objectives in the incident action plan.

The equity officer coordinates with transportation, mass care, health, logistics, communications, power and utilities, search and rescue, and recovery. The position also liaises with partners such as the Red Cross and localized disability-led nonprofits such as Upstream Access.

This collaboration helps to ensure that people with disabilities and access and functional needs can evacuate safely and be treated with dignity in shelters. Equity considerations also shape evacuation guidance. For example, encouraging households for people with disabilities to evacuate at a level 2 beset notice rather than waiting for level 3 go now so that they have time and resources needed to reach safety. This practice actually comes from one of our nine federally recognized tribes, the Burns Paiute tribe, which has some fantastic practices to ensure health and safety of elders and people with disabilities in the tribe. So there is a great deal to learn from indigenous practices when it comes to disaster equity.

Finally the equity officer contributes to the design of after-action review guidance, ensuring that the lessons learned include equity and accessibility considerations to strengthen future responses. Of course evacuation starts with timely and equitable communication, all of which must be arranged well in advance of a hazard, and that is why we prioritize accessible alerts and warnings. In Oregon we use the Everbridge platform statewide to deliver emergency alerts across multiple channels: Text, voice, email, push notifications, and social media, so that people can receive information in the format that best works for them. It integrates with FEMA's IPAWS system, supports text to speech and multilingual templates and allows pre-scripted language alerts that are easier for screen readers.

While these features exist in the platform, the real impact comes from how they're used which is why we prioritized targeted training and ongoing education with local emergency managers throughout the year to ensure that alerts are developed and delivered in ways that are inclusive and accessible to the whole community.

Through my work on the statewide committee on alerting practices, I collaborate with disability advocates and nonprofits to codevelop alert templates in multiple languages and accessible formats so that the local emergency managers can quickly push out notifications to reach the whole community in appropriate ways.

And central to all of this work is the role of our Disability and Emergency Management Advisory Council, DMAC. DMAC is supported by three state agencies: Department of Human Services; Oregon Health Authority; Oregon Emergency Management. Because DOS and DHA are the lead functions for mass case and medical services, their membership includes people with disabilities, their caregivers, local emergency managers, and representatives from Oregon's centers for independent living, so that this critical expertise is always at the table.

DMAC reviews emergency operations plans, both at the county and state levels through an accessibility lens and participates in exercises and trainings contributing lived experience that helps us bridge knowledge with practice.

We are also developing new pathways for community input into our after-action reports. Instead of limiting those reports to state agency perspectives, we seek participation from community-based organizations and members of the public to share their lived experiences of our state response. And we don't just produce a static document; we also develop alternative formats such as digital story maps that capture these experiences in more accessible and meaningful ways, ensuring that lessons learned truly reflect the experiences of the whole community so that we can improve for the next crisis.

New programs such as this do take time to fully come to fruition. I have only been with my agency for about a year and a half, not even 2 years, so I'm very grateful to my colleagues, some of my personal heroes on this panel, for sharing their knowledge and experience and to you, Council Members, for your input so that we know that we are on the right path in Oregon and we are not building from scratch. Though much work still remains to be done. Thank you.

AMY NICHOLAS: Natasha, thank you for that.

Quick question for you to follow up because you said you've only been there for about a year and a half. Those are some amazing policies, programs that you're trying to implement. Did you receive any push back from the state or the different agencies when you were trying to integrate the disability competency?

NATASHA FOX: One of the practices that I have undertaken at the agency is to provide an anonymous virtual comment box for all staff so that people can share their feedback unencumbered by any kind of repercussions. And I occasionally do receive comments that say things like why do we have to do this, what's the point, everyone's equal, things like that.

So because those comments are anonymous, I take those and try and build some overarching comments into my work to remind people that we live in an uneven playing field and that equity means everyone has what they need in order to survive and persevere through crisis, yeah.

AMY NICHOLAS: Great. Thank you.

Next we have Beth Meyer. Beth is the Executive Director of the Florida Independent Living Council. She has been there since 2018.

Beth was appointed to the Florida Building Commission in 2013 where she worked on the 2014 Florida accessibility building codes. She currently sits on the accessibility advisory council, which reviews any of the waiver requests for the codes.

Beth, the state of Florida is unique, as we have discovered, in which -- I'm sorry, the emergency management report produced over the years, one of which has been the lack of coordination with the independent living center before and after disasters with the state. You've managed to create that relationship. In fact, you've got the gas card, right? And by doing so, I mean you have a roadmap for other states to aspire to.

Please tell us a little bit about what you did achieve so everybody else can be in on the intel as I am, and how you got there.

BETH MEYER: Thank you so much for inviting me. We appreciate the work that happens here at the NCD. We appreciate your work and efforts. And of course my road, my presentation isn't going to be as eloquent because I had no, you know, I had no rules so to speak at the beginning.

This started in 2018 when I came after working at a CIL for many years and working as an ADA coordinator, working on project civic access, so understanding what that looks like at a county level really was very helpful for me.

When we started in 2018, we were on the defense after Hurricane Michael. The mass care human services group and the state EOC heard about our daily calls that I started with our CILs to see if we could help the CIL that was directly impacted. We didn't even know if the Executive Director had survived because his CIL was directly hit in Panama City.

So we were reaching out to help our colleague is how this all started, and the CILs came together and we started figuring out what we weren't at the right tables. We were not able to provide appropriate support. And I reached out to our federal partner at ACL and said, give me some guidance here. I know we're not allowed to provide programmatic work, but, you know, we need a very robust communication platform.

So I started these and continued with the daily calls which showed me all of the -- what I felt like were failures of communication. And the time that it would take for the state to ask for help from a CIL, with DME equipment, with interpreters, with services they provide every day, was it took too long.

During that disaster there was a lot of movement of people, and then people don't get to go, they don't get to live in the community that they choose. It was a real problem.

And so we met after the hurricane, and when we did that, we just had a discussion. Let's be real. This is just with the CILs. What do we do before a storm? What do we do during a storm? What do we do after a storm? And we identified goals and objectives and we put those in our 2018 SPIL and we then evolved it to really create a roadmap. And it's really about being humble enough to capture the failure and then identifying the failure and then not doing it again.

The SPIL has provided the support that the centers for independent living need, that state plan for independent living that every state has, and working with our federal partners, with ACL, we received a lot of support. We identified when we took away the storm and talked about services provided, we really identified some core services that we're already providing. And then we started to understand that we had no data. We had no data. We had no idea of what would be the best way to collect the data. And so then again, we learned, we leaned on the SPIL, the state plan. We have to collect quarterly reports. Okay. How are we collecting those quarterly reports. It was just like an onion for us. The state plan got us to a table at the state level, which allowed the CILs to do their job. There is no way a Center for Independent Living who was directly impacted by a disaster has the capability to serve the community, take care of the staff and themselves, put the CIL back together, and respond to all kinds of and search for who needs help.

So what we do at the SPIL is I take all the information that the Governor is putting out. We are welcome and go to the state emergency operation center as soon as they're activated. We know the game plan. We're under human services in our comprehensive emergency management plan for our state. There's our access and functional needs. And then there's one nongovernmental agency. And it's the centers for independent living. It's not the State Independent Living Council, the SILC. We're not providing the service. So we have to make sure there's clear communication, that we know who is providing those services.

Now we have created a roadmap and we talk about lessons learned. Now we work with the partnership and we understand the CILs are understanding what they need to do to prepare even internally their own building, getting a standard, you know, SOPs and this is what we're going to do to protect everyone. There's communication before the storm hits, then we take the day, we let the storm pass, and then we hit when 9:00 calls every single morning until we can kind of wean, you know, we just kind of assess at that time.

We have had access and functional need coordinators that have been fantastic. During Hurricane Helene, it was myself and another organization that worked to fill that gap because there was nobody there to fill that gap.

So if we hadn't been there, then there would have been like literally no one.

So we work on all of that, but we feel like we have come up with a really good -- now we're tracking data, we know how many -- who our partners are, we know what the durable medical equipment that goes up. We even had 100% of the durable medical equipment for Hurricane Helene was provided by the centers for independent living and nobody else. And that's a big deal because that's wrap around services also. That also means wrap around services, which means they're connected to their community. I feel like the CILs have been marginalized in their efforts after a storm because it can be a big business. And storms are local. So starts there.

I look forward to participating with this group.

AMY NICHOLAS: Thank you, Beth. I appreciate it. And I do plan on follow-up questions after all of the panelists have spoken.

We're going to move on. I've got you all in different order here at the table. I apologize. To the far left, Kira is next. Kira Tiller is a sophomore at UNC Chapel Hill, the founder and Executive Director of Disabled Disruptors. Kira authored and successfully lobbied to pass legislation in the state of Virginia to ensure that students with IEPs were provided with emergency evacuation accommodations embedded into their IEPs.

So I will hand this over to Kira. Welcome.

KIRA TILLER: Am I good with the mic?

SHAWN KENNEMER: Sure. Turn it on.

KIRA TILLER: Okay. Awesome.

So hi, my name is Kira Tiller. And I just want to thank Amy, the Chairperson, as well as all the Council Members for having me here today. It's really a great honor to be able to talk to you all about initiatives around emergency management with my organization that have really just been forgotten for so long.

So I am the Executive Director of an organization called Disabled Disruptors. I founded this organization during my junior year of high school. We are a student-led national coalition for advancing disability justice through education, policy, advocacy. And specific within education policy, we have really focused on emergency management and the gaps there.

And so my legislative advocacy was really inspired by my personal experience as a disabled student. I have epilepsy, and flashing lights are one of my triggers. So fire drills in schools were always a huge challenge and danger for me. And my school never really took this seriously despite me asking for emergency accommodations in my IEP plan for over 6 years. It was something that was consistently dismissed. I was told that emergency accommodations belonged in a health plan on file with the nurse's office. But the nurse isn't with you when the fire alarm goes off. The health plan is not something that my teachers were informed on. And it's not something that is legally binding the way an IEP is.

Throughout middle school, I was put into the counselor's office with no lights to essentially sit out drills. And I didn't have a plan at high school until my junior year after advocating for many, many years.

And so for myself, what I needed was to wear blackout sunglasses. There's these sunglasses I made with blacked out tape that I would wear, and I had an aide in the classroom that would guide me out of the building safely while I was closing my eyes and had those glasses on so I could get out of the building safely and efficiently while not being at risk of having a seizure.

And after I founded Disabled Disruptors and had conversations with students across the country about this issue, I realized that this was essentially a universal issue for all students with disabilities. For students like me who had epilepsy and the fire alarms were a danger, for students with sensory disabilities and neurodivergence like autism, many of them were triggered by the loud sounds. For students with mobility disabilities in schools that were not accessible, may have been on the second or third floor during emergencies, they were often forgotten during evacuations. And so I was kind of shocked at the lack of legislative precedent protecting disabled students during emergency situations. There was even a case with one student, a first grader who is a wheelchair user, and he had an informal plan with his school where a designated staff member would meet him in the hallway and get him out of the building safely.

Well, a real fire happened. It was not properly communicated. The designated staff member never met him in the hallway, and firefighters ultimately found him in the building. And thank God he survived, but if they hadn't been there, he easily could have died.

So this is really a life or death issue for disabled students.

And so in my home state of Virginia, I wrote a bill ensuring that emergency accommodations are offered to every student with an IEP plan and that for 504 teams, that the State Department of Education offer guidance and support to 504 teams to also develop emergency plans for students with 504s.

And I introduced this -- I got this legislation introduced in the 2024 session of the Virginia General Assembly. And I worked with a lot of coalitions to do this. I was actually initially introduced to the legislator who first introduced my bill at a disability voting rights press conference hosted by REV UP which I'm sure many of you are familiar with is a voting rights branch of AAPD. I am a part of the chapter in my state.

So we both spoke at this press conference, and after that I talked to the disability delegate, Rodney Willet who introduced this bill in the 2024 session.

Unfortunately it didn't pass in 2024 because I think a lot of legislators didn't fully understand this issue and kind of felt that this wasn't needed and that this was already happening.

And so throughout the rest of 2024, we mobilized students, parents, teachers, as well as the Virginia CIL and local CILs to educate legislators, Virginia legislators, on this issue and why it is so important.

And then I reintroduced this legislation in the 2025 session with Delegate Laura Jane Cohen, who had previously had experience serving on the Fairfax County School Board. She had children with disabilities and was intimately familiar with this issue.

In the 2025 session, I'm pleased to announce that it passed out of the Virginia House of Delegates and the Virginia State Senate unanimously, and it was signed into law by the Governor.

This is such a huge victory for disabled students, for parents, for educators, for anyone who cares about children not being left behind to die. So this is something that we really want to expand across the country because, like I mentioned earlier, this is just a gap in education policy that so many people just haven't even considered or so many people have just already assumed that this is something that is being implemented in IEPs when it's not.

So we're working on expanding this initiative to other states. I'm also working with Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley's office on introducing a federal bill to address this. And so yeah, we're hoping, you know, in -- we're going to keep pushing federally and across the country to ensure that disabled students don't have to be afraid in their schools and can focus on learning and can feel like their safety is not an afterthought in their schools.

AMY NICHOLAS: Wow. Thank you, Kira. Definitely have some follow-up questions for you as well. I'm going to save those for a little bit later.

Next on the panel we have Dr. Lidia Fonseca. I hope I said your last name right. She's the Executive Director at Valley Association for Independent Living in Texas. It's an independent living center that provides services to people in the Texas region. Sorry. Duplicating myself there.

Lidia, thank you for being here. I hand it over to you.

LIDIA FONSECA: Hi, good morning, everyone. Thank you for the invitation, Amy, and to the Council. I'm so happy to be here and alongside my colleagues who do some amazing work, so thank you for that.

Yes, so I am the Executive Director of our Center for Independent Living in the south Texas region. We do have 27 centers in our state. We are a large state, in Texas, but we do cover all of the Texas region.

The way that our center has been involved in emergency preparedness started off with attending a All Hazards Conference that our region was doing, our county was doing. They called it in Texas All Hazards Conference. We submitted a proposal to present to first responders because that was the audience there and to talk about, you know, what people with disabilities truly need and what the differences may be when you're encountering a person with a disability.

So when we presented there, this was about 7 years ago, it was one of the most I guess the most well -- a lot of participants attend. And they did reach out to the conference committee and said they needed more of them, more education on how to work with people with disabilities. So then that led to us forming what they call an inclusive response committee with our local county health department. And we were basically at the table and cohosting this conference now because they wanted us at the table to see how could they integrate inclusiveness and folks with disabilities in different ways, not just in presentations on educating first responders, but the conference itself logistics.

So what that meant now is for 7 years we've had a conference that is the most largely attended in the nation in terms of an All Hazards Conference. We get over 4,000 people who attend this conference because it is free to first responders and to the community.

And so now this conference has an accommodations table. It has a room, a sensory room. It has all the things that we're so used to in our world that we should have and now it is being implemented in more of a public space where folks are not used to and they're getting an idea of what it means to have a really inclusive space.

We also -- what's important about this conference is that now at least 70% of the presentations involve how to work and how to talk to folks with disabilities and different types of disabilities. So it started with one presentation which was cross disability, and now there's specific panels, how to work with persons who are Deaf and hard of hearing, how to work with someone with a physical disability, or cognitive. So it's really specialized. And first responders from different areas like firefighters, police department, U.S. customs and homeland folks can do what they can to help the community.

One of the things that we implemented now at the conference is a basic ASL for first responders course that they all are part of. It's part of the main plenary session so everybody attends that. So first responders who come in can learn basic ASL depending on their area in first responders.

Another thing that we did implement at this conference, we wanted to make a presentation on the critical incident response training. So if you guys are familiar with that, that's essentially an active shooter training for civilians. This happened in our state after -- there's been a lot of school shootings, right, but I want to say it was about 5 years ago and we worked with our local county sheriff’s department to see, okay, you have this critical incident response training across the state but how are you considering the needs of students with disabilities in the school or in the workplace, employees with disabilities, right? So we sat down at the table and we designed the training which is inclusive critical response training. And we brought folks from different areas with different disabilities and ran through the curriculum which is essentially run hide fight. And in each section, we talked about, okay, if somebody is nonverbal, if somebody has a mobility device, how are they going to do these things that you're recommending in each of these sections.

So they were all able to provide that feedback. So we were able to redesign this training at a new level.

Also related to that, if you all are familiar with the "I Love U Guys" Foundation, they created the poster that most school districts use that shows how to shelter in place in case there's an active shooter or if there's a weather emergency outside, the different kinds of things to do, which is an amazing resource. But we felt that it needed to be redesigned for people with different types of disabilities. So we were able to redesign it using plain language and images so that if a student with a disability is walking down the hall, something is happening, they would know the direction and the instructions on that poster.

That was also presented at the All Hazards Conference as a training, and from there people requested more information on that and education.

Another thing that we worked on that came out of the inclusive response committee is Community Emergency Response Team, CERT. That is essentially civilians, community members that get trained on how to be kind of first at the scene, right? If something happens at your community and you have this training, kind of assess before the first responders get there. It's a fire safety, how to use a fire extinguisher, applying first aid, light search and rescue, those kinds of things.

So we had all of our center staff, 27 staff, get trained to be certified. And part of that led to having the first Deaf CERT team in our state. I'm not sure if other states have had that, but we got folks who are Deaf trained in this. And when we went through the training, we identified some of the curriculum and how to may not really work for somebody who doesn't use English as their first language. For example, in the light search and rescue part, if the person in the building is Deaf and you're being told that what you should do is call out their name because it's unsafe to go into the building to see if they're not there, obviously they can't hear you. So a simple thing like using a flashlight, using a whistle, or if the person who is conducting the search and rescue is Deaf themselves, they were able to use those resources as well.

So we're really trying to push for more people in our local community to be CERT certified. With our local county emergency department, we started a yearlong -- it started in March to November, emergency preparedness pop up events. Essentially that is around the city and county, having events in rural areas because we're very rural in the south Texas region. And the community would learn tips for safety, extreme heat safety. And our center was able to provide emergency kits to the people there and train them on how to use it. And then on top of that include in these kits accessible items like grip aids or anything that may be needed for somebody with a certain type of disability and train them on how to use the kits. A lot of times people put the kits together but don't know how to use them until something happens. So having that education there.

We had a flash flood happen in March, in our area particularly, and it just so happens to be at day we were at the south Texas All Hazards Conference so all first responders were in this building when the flash flood happened in the south Texas region in March. In a matter of 30 seconds, the water rose and everything was flooded where we were at in the area. And after that flooding is when we decided to put together or work with our county and they started to do the public events so people can be really prepared.

Fast forward 3 months later in July, we have that devastating flood in the center of Texas, right. So there's a lot of work that needs to be done, and we're trying to hopefully implement this at the statewide level because we're only in the south Texas region but of course every county is unique to their needs. So we really feel like a tool kit to implement that will be amazing and prepare people to take the pieces that work for them.

I'm just happy to be here and excited to work on this with you guys.

AMY NICHOLAS: Thank you, Lidia. We're happy to have you and I'm looking forward to using your knowledge to inform the tool kit. So thank you.

And last but not least, we have German Parodi from the Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies.

German is C-Executive Director of Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies, the nation's disability and disaster hub. Partnership has been leading the way for advancement of people with disabilities before, during, and after disasters and emergencies in the U.S. and around the world.

German, thank you for being here. Partnership is unique compared to the other panelists because he and they coordinate with everyone. Every state. Every territory. Every tribe. They've got the pulse on all of them. They can tell some stories.

So I mean, German, you're uniquely situated to know what works and doesn't work at a statewide level. More of what doesn't work unfortunately. So would love to hear what you have seen and what you would recommend that every state should have, what they should do, and why.

GERMAN PARODI: This is German. Thank you, Amy, for inviting me to this panel among great colleagues here, and thank you, Chairman and members of the Council, for allowing me to provide comments today.

Local disability organizations, advocates, emergency managers, public health officials, and other stakeholders. We lead disaster response, training, technical assistance, and (inaudible).

My comments today will cover why disability and access and functional need integration must be system wide. How a coordinator adds value to produce a support function. The asset of the community-based organization. And essential elements of a safe tool kit for disability and access and functional need integration.

Our recommendations reflect the Partnership's direct experience of disaster survivors and incorporates trusted sources.

Federal rights law requires states and local governments to provide equal access to emergency programs. Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 prohibit discrimination and require effective communication, reasonable modification, and accessible (inaudible).

One in four people in the United States have a disability, and people with disabilities are two to four times more likely to be injured or die in disasters than noun disabled people.

In the wake of the hurricanes in 2017, the Government Accountability Office found that FEMA's efforts were inconsistent. Regional offices lacked clear procedures for integrating disability advisers, and had not provided sufficient training, leaving states and local managers ill-prepared to serve people with disabilities.

FEMA's Office of Disability Integration and Coordination has worked to close such gaps. As FEMA moves the functions of ODIC, now to the Office of Civil Rights, the statutory responsibilities of the disability coordinator established in code must continue. And consistent with the FEMA format, the coordinator must report directly to the administrator. The disability coordinator's duties include consulting with organizations representing people with disabilities to inform planning and relief effort. And NCD as well.

Since the departure of outgoing ODIC Director Dr. Sherman Gillums, Jr., in March of this year and subsequently his acting administrator Elizabeth Edge since June of this year, there has been no communication from ODIC to us, if we have a great relationship, or anyone that we can really speak to.

However, at the state level, we are seeing adoption of whole community approaches. Natasha was sharing some in Oregon. Others to follow are Colorado and Nevada which operationalized this approach by having state level functional need coordinator or relevant staff to apply the CMIS framework.

Integrating a dedicated access and functional need coordinator with access across each function translates federal guidance into practice.

The National Response Framework organizes federal, state, and local responses for 15 different emergency support functions. My written comments will provide examples of how this work can be implemented in each ESF, but to go over a couple of them, the first is transportation. We need for the access and functional need staff to support this ESF lead in coordinating transportation to ensure evacuations plan to include wheelchair-accessible buses and other equipment that provides access for people with disabilities.

And they need to be trained on how to provide the service, including how to engage with support animals and service animal handlers.

In communications, second ESF, we must ensure that emergency alerts in every mode, including press briefings and public service announcements are actionable and provide captioning, American Sign Language, and are in plain language and multilingual formats.

ESF 6 is a very important one. It's called mass care, emergency assistance, temporary housing, and human services. There we must ensure that mass care sites are accessible and provide and use the CMIS framework during intake. This will allow workers to quickly identify access and functional needs that are not being met and quickly procure what is needed to support them.

ESF 8, public health services needs to work on streamlining replacing medications and lost durable medical equipment, not only in healthcare settings but also in the community.

And with this, coordinating personal services at home continuity and oxygen are priorities that we see in every disaster as common threats that happen again and again the most common denominator.

Talking about common denominator, the loss of power is essential in being mitigated. The work with utilities needs to happen in developing programs like California has and Colorado has around providing alternative power back up sources for households using life sustaining equipment. And organizations like my colleagues here that support communities during disaster, oftentimes can be the difference between being able to provide service or not.

We have heard of different ways that independent living network becomes an asset for emergency managers. A couple other examples come from Puerto Rico. The independent living there, MAVI, has worked across the island with partners to supply emergency services including the distribution of potential supplies during disasters, generators, and members of the core advisory group that has representation across the island can coordinate support whenever it's effective.

They also provide solar energy education since the power grid since Maria has completely failed.

Wisconsin leads the emergency preparedness effort. They published a tool kit and voluntary access for providing functional needs gap. So finding a two-way communication is crucial during a disaster.

And in California, Disability Rights Network there provides major help during disasters and following supporting people with disabilities appeal to FEMA and other programs when they are denied. They also help people with disabilities find programs that they are eligible for during disaster.

They also work with the statewide access and functional needs council, works with their own utilities to be able to support people with disabilities.

This demonstrates that disability-led organizations, particularly community based, deliver essential measures during disaster.

In building a tool kit, centering equity in all places is essential. Use equity as a foundational lens across awareness, response and recovery, and access to information on sheltering. And talking about equity, in 2021, FEMA defined equity as the consistent fair, impartial treatment of an individual.

As we close today, I want to make sure that clear recommendations to the Council are mentioned. We need in every state and large local emergency management agency a designated access and functional needs staff as part of the EOC structure, and this role needs to be codified in state plan. We need to request that FEMA and DoJ provide technical assistance and enforcement to ensure states and local agencies comply with the ADA, Section 504 of litigation.

Many jurisdictions still lack accessible shelters and communication. We saw that as a major flaw.

Need to encourage a national model for access and functional needs integration across the ESF adaptable by states and localities. And need to promote metrics and accountability by recommending to FEMA require states to report how they are meeting the needs of people with disabilities. And FEMA should publish a report in an accessible fashion.

In closing, a dedicated coordinator as part of each emergency support function, describing the role and states having a comprehensive focus will significantly help people with disabilities, people with access and functional needs after disasters. The partnership is ready to support the Council. Thank you.

AMY NICHOLAS: Thank you, German. And I will take you up on that.

A couple follow-up questions I did have for many of you. Any of you all can jump in.

Theo, do you have -- go for it. It's all right. You may ask one that I'm going to ask.

THEO BRADDY: Two questions. One, did I hear you say that since June in your position, you've eliminated work with FEMA?

GERMAN PARODI: Specifically with the Office of Disability Coordination. Other parts of FEMA, individual assistance continue engaging, but ODIC has the role, the responsibility, by statutory requirement to engage the community. And since June we have heard zero.

THEO BRADDY: Follow up. To any of you all. I guess I got a little bias here, but would you say that centers for independent living are essential to any emergency preparedness team?

LIDIA FONSECA: Absolutely.

THEO BRADDY: And right now you don't see that being utilized enough?

LIDIA FONSECA: No. This is Lidia. I don't see that being utilized enough across the nation, in the state, and even within your service area which many counties are involved. I think that's why this tool kit is essential because it will provide a roadmap to integrate that and identify the needs.

BETH MEYER: This is Beth. I'm just going to add that the centers for independent living have been really doing this work with no way of collecting data forever. They've already been doing this work. So what you see is they are just doing their thing. So what we're trying to do, and I hope this is going to be a great opportunity for us, is really to say, you know, the state, help out the centers, the SILCs. Help out. What I found is when we put our centers for independent living, and they were all part of this, identifying what they already did, when we put it in the state plan, it kind of codified it a little bit. And we are able because they have to report, we were able to actually create a data that had never been collected because they have to report on questions in the state plan. So we were asking questions to understand the roadmap. And now we have the first ever comprehensive emergency data collection that the CILs use already, and we just pulled it all together to share. But they have to be able to get credit for the work that they do, and they've been doing it. So I think the CILs are a huge part of the solution.

THEO BRADDY: Thank you.

SHAWN KENNEMER: So can I follow up on that?

So I actually serve on a board of the Kern County Center for Independent Living. And so when you say the CIL being a part of that. Is there funding out there for the CILs? Because I know in Kern County, the center for independent living is overwhelmed with all the work they're currently doing to take on more.

THEO BRADDY: I don't believe there's funding. I think she was hinting at that. So they're doing it regardless. But I think an important aspect of that is recognizing that they play an important role and should be the first contact if anybody has questions.

SHAWN KENNEMER: I think it's a whole community theme has to be a part, and yes, CILs have to be a part of that. So is there funding available or is that something that needs to happen.

THEO BRADDY: Something that needs to happen. I think ACL is sort of acknowledging that, if I'm not wrong on that.

BETH MEYER: They did provide money to assist with Hurricane Ian survivors, but it was little bit after the storm had happened, there was funding and the centers for independent living used that and applied for that funding because it was through the part C but it was a significant $3.5 million that ACL, you know, at that time had contributed.

But it's diversion and transition in the purist sense of what diverting and transition is. So they're already doing the work on a 5th core service on an unfunded mandate. So are they getting paid for this? No. Are they doing the work? Yes. Why? Because they're centers for independent living.

AMY NICHOLAS: NCD has recommended that in almost every emergency management report that we've had over the last decade is that the independent living centers need to be funded. That we've been working with FEMA to have FEMA work -- I know. I know. I see Beth shaking her head. To have FEMA work with the counties to get MOUs together so that you can get paid for services provided. And we're not there yet.

GERMAN PARODI: This is German. Couple of other points. Within FEMA, it could work to recognize centers for independent living and other independent living network organizations as private nonprofits that provide protective measures during disasters. We have seen in Pennsylvania reimbursement for this from FEMA. Florida has been denied for doing this. So there is a discrepancy that needs to be worked on.

SHAWN KENNEMER: So I'm sorry, you're saying they receive money after the fact.

GERMAN PARODI: Yes.

SHAWN KENNEMER: So do the job but don't get compensated until something actually bad happens.

GERMAN PARODI: In a federal reimbursement way, yes.

But also, I would add that we are working to reintroduce the emergency access for aging and disability inclusion access which NCD has supported in the past. And we are working with our legislators to introduce it by the end of September. It will have two new sections, one to codify into statute the moneys that Beth was talking about. We are discussing 100 million per year for response as grants available and that hopefully ACL will administer.

But also preparedness grants at the amount of 300 billion a year. Localities will be qualified for this but there is specific work that is this is for people with disabilities, peer support, or that the IL network is qualifiable for.

KIM RIDLEY: Great job, everybody. Thank you.

First, Kira, I just have to say, I am blown away by what you have done as a student. I worked with a legislature for 28 and a half years and I can count on one hand bills moving that quickly. So pat yourself on the back. Strongly suspect we will hear your name in the future. And I will bring back to New York your idea for having that in IEPs. So I was blown away. Congratulations.

Question on the tool kit that both you guys have mentioned. In New York, we have tool kits. I strongly suspect that many other states. But I think it would be something that maybe we could talk a little bit more here that nationally, you know, there is a list of things that go into these tool kits.

Can you guys tell us what types of disability items you had? Because I expect some just for everybody, what types of disability items you have put into your tool kits?

LIDIA FONSECA: So the tool kits I was mentioning is the one that's being recommended by the Council to write. So I haven't done one yet. But we've done other tool kits for other kinds of things but what I was speaking about today is getting together at the table for all of us who are here to put everything that has worked very well in each of our respective fields into this tangible material that states can use and have a roadmap for.

KIM RIDLEY: In particular, I'm referring to the pop up events.

LIDIA FONSECA: Oh, sure.

KIM RIDLEY: You mentioned something about grippers. We have something similar. But what do you guys include in those?

LIDIA FONSECA: The emergency kits, is that what you meant?

I'm sorry. Okay. So it's a four-person three-day emergency kit. In our area, it's flooding mostly so it will be items more related to that kind of stuff but in that emergency tool kit there's MREs, so prepared meals. If they do want to add to their kit like canned and nonperishable foods, we also add grip aids to open those up a little bit easier.

We at our center have a Braille machine so we put in there a resource, like different community resources that they can look for and we do it in Braille, in Spanish, and we also do ASL. So we have a good amount of staff who are Deaf and hard of hearing and use American Sign Language as their first language. And what we do a lot, we work with the county specifically for the kits is we'll get the material, the resource book, and we'll have our staff translate it in ASL and then we'll put our QR code on each page so people can access the information in ASL.

So those are some examples that we include.

KIM RIDLEY: Great. Thank you so much.

BETH MEYER: If I can adjust one thing. In our state plan when we're collecting, we ask which one of the CILs were providing emergency preparedness conferences and what did they do at the conference. And that was some of the data that we collected. All of the CILs had created an emergency preparedness kind of conference. For are the county, it's a great opportunity for individuals to come in and it's really about the county people learning about who lives in their community. Sometimes knowing who lives in your county when you're a county official is the biggest lesson that is learned. But it brings everyone together. We set up like mock shelters so they can see how not happy they are. But it's a mock shelter. So what to prepare, what to bring. And then they bring, they put together their individual personalized kind of checklist, a priority of what they need when they evacuate. And kind of working through the decisions of evacuating or sheltering in place, what does that look like, when can you do that, who do you listen to. And they put together these little bags of survival things.

And so most of the CILs do that. Does it happen in every county even though we have statewide coverage? No, it doesn't. Some of the rural counties are really challenging. So, you know, that's a big focus for us, those rural farming communities. They're very -- a disaster in a rural community is so much harder than if it hits a populated area.

AMY NICHOLAS: Great. All right. I'm going to ask a few questions. Anyone else?

ANA TORRES-DAVIS: Hi. Thank you all. Very, very interesting, and good work.

Several years ago we were talking about shelters and the issues about shelters and the accessibility of shelters. And NCD was very concerned about that. At some point we wrote a letter to HUD and they were asking for comments on CS -- SPDG funds. We raised these issues to them about unnecessary institutions after disasters. People that had homes that were accessible to them that were destroyed often could not go back to those homes, they didn't have the funds to make them accessible again and they couldn't find temporary housing that was accessible. And then the shelters weren't accessible and people ended up getting put in nursing homes or other assisted living facilities and then they couldn't get out because there wasn't anywhere to go to after.

And I'm just wondering if you're seeing that that is still going on today and if states have been more willing to recognize responsibility for making shelters accessible and providing what needs to be provided.

Thank you.

NATASHA FOX: Thank you so much for that question. This is Natasha.

AMY NICHOLAS: You're fine. I want you to answer that. I also want to add on to that question regarding shelters. Just we've talked about it before and I know Natasha you talked about the equitability of shelters. What Ana was asking, I also would like to know, there's always been the issue of who is responsible for ensuring accessibility of shelters. What steps has Oregon taken, or anyone else can answer that different states have taken to ensure that emergency shelters are accessible?

NATASHA FOX: Thank you. And I look forward to hearing some insight from this panel as well.

Oregon Emergency Management does work closely with the Department of Human Services to ensure that mass care and congregate sheltering practices are inclusive and accessible to everyone. The state has developed a detailed tool, template that guides local jurisdictions in setting up shelters through an equity and trauma-informed lens. The tool outlines step-by-step practices for ensuring physical accessibility including entrances, restrooms, sleeping areas, dining spaces, and so on.

And also for providing communication access through various interpreting services, alternate formats for information, and accessible signage, things of that nature.

And they also require shelters to plan for access and functional needs support services, including backup power for medical devices and durable medical equipment, refrigeration for medications, and personal assistance services and accommodations for service animals.

And the goal is for people with disabilities to stay with their families and caregivers in shelters and maintain independence and dignity while receiving the same level of safety and care as everyone else.

And when it comes to responsibility for accessibility in sheltering and evacuation, I think it is a matter of some, to some degree, of sharing responsibility with the Department of Human Services, the health authority, and emergency support function each must contribute to standard setting and guidelines, for example, and nonprofits and community-based organizations must bring critical experience and expertise, and of course local emergency managers and partners like the Red Cross do deliver those services on the ground.

But my role at Oregon Emergency Management is to be accountable for ensuring that those accessibility standards are in place. And if a shelter is going to be listed in my agency's public information materials or on our GIS tool so that the public can see where those shelters are, we must include information on what accessibility services and features are in that shelter. What services and equipment they can expect. What accommodations are for service animals. And so on.

And we also do work with Red Cross and other volunteer agencies on training volunteers and orienting them with the CMIS tools for shelter intake practices as well so that people visiting shelters can be triaged and their needs met immediately.

I think I'll pause there and just let people contribute, if you'd like.

BETH MEYER: You're probably going to have responses from everyone on this one.

It's -- so shelters, it's very interesting. Because we have two shelters in Florida. We have the general pop and the special needs shelter which I know is where people register to go to. So that's a whole separate, you know, really discussion.

However, those are usually, they all have electrical generated batteries. They all have -- they also are working with the Department of Health and other state organizations. And those shelters have many times have a hospital possibly sponsoring that shelter so they're only open -- and they're international schools except for maybe two. So the thing in Florida is, which we found so interesting, is shelters open. People -- we had over 88,000 people in shelters for Milton. I mean, that's good. Right? People are seeking safety. 88,000 people. Unheard of.

We see a mass exodus. Like literally. Everyone goes home within 48 hours. Nobody is staying in the shelter if they don't have to. And so that's where our CILs -- and it's people, we've almost gone through it so many times that people are trained. You have to go home. Okay, it's passed. Go home. That's where our CILs are coming in with generators and other things to help people stay at home if they can.

We also, the other great thing about our SPIL is when we were writing it, for the disaster component, is we found a disaster reveals systemic barriers really quick. It's like you can take all the other stuff, all the fluff and stuff off because it just shows you the raw truth. And so where our centers, what were they doing with housing? Now we have a lot of our centers are working on housing. Some of them were approved to receive SHIP dollars, which meant that our center was replacing the house that was damaged for their consumer. You know? Making it right. So that they could get home.

So it's an interesting trend to see what, how the community responds to disasters. Sheltering is -- the long-term shelters are these mega shelters that pop up when all of the other general pop and everything else closes. But everybody gets to go home. Everyone is taken back to their community. And some of our centers review the mega shelters to make sure that they're accessible. A lot of them will bring in DME and support to get people out of the shelter as soon as possible. It's very complicated, but the community knows the longer you stay in the shelter, the more likely you are to be moved, so they go home.

LIDIA FONSECA: This is Lidia. Yeah, I would like to add that at least in our area, so we had winter storm Yuri in 2021. Our state was not ready for the power grid. And one of the things that we were seeing was that folks, well, first of all, there were at least 200 deaths and half of those were people with disabilities and people who were older. And from that percentage, about half of those were because of lack of electricity. So there was a lot of talks of how we could address that. And it's still ongoing. Folks who couldn't continue at home because of lack of electricity and the need for equipment for on power, were trying to get into shelters but because it was hurting everyone, they weren't able to get in because shelters were packed. So they were forced to go back home where they couldn't use lifesaving equipment.

Another thing that we saw, people were being turned away because of their service animals and certain shelters were listed as not having pets but having to educate folks in the shelters and letting them know service animals are different. Not pet. Or whatever the case may be. That was a barrier.

But we're having those talks now and they're reaching out to us, to CILs, to have those conversations to ensure that doesn't happen again. And if they list a place or area as a shelter, they're reaching out to us to conduct ADA accessibility assessments to ensure that they're ready to go.

GERMAN PARODI: This is German. So it will be per state, per area, how good, how ready are shelters equipped to support people with disabilities and different access and functional needs.

During Helene, Georgia and the Carolinas, without having dedicated staff and strong cohesive involvement of the community, we saw people on oxygen who had no more way to get replacement oxygen during those initial critical days. Some had to go to fire stations every 2 hours to get it refilled. Some having to go to a hospital. And that opens up a pipeline to institutionalization.

There needs to be also a clear look into housing. We are still dealing and supporting folks from Maui and the wildfire there. Also programs like FEMA's direct lease program, which increased the rent 300 times. 3 hundredfold.

So housing is a critical issue. But while we work on sustainable housing for mass casualty, mass disaster event, shelters need to understand that they have to -- you have to comply with the needs of the community. That being communication, physical access, or just dietary needs because that's also a big one. And thinking, also mentioned Puerto Rico. Dealing with loss that doesn't allow resources to rapidly enter into islands after disasters. Don't allow shelters to have proper fuel for their survivors.

AMY NICHOLAS: Thank you. Thank you, German.

One thing I wanted to ask too, the state plan was created in Florida and is pretty impressive. Natasha, I'll put you on the spot. What would Oregon need to do to create a state plan similar/inclusive of the independent living centers as is set up in Florida?

NATASHA FOX: Money.

[Laughter]

Always. Always need more resources.

For Oregon to replicate something like the Florida CEMP, we would need clearer statutory requirements in our Oregon state statute 401 to assign agency leadership roles and mandate regular updates and regional coordination. We will also need to embed disability and access and functional needs into every emergency and recovery support function, which we are currently in the process of doing through our ESF and RSF annexes as we update our comprehensive emergency management plan. So that sheltering, evaluation, medical care, and communications are all designed with accessibility built in.

And another way that Oregon could strengthen our comprehensive emergency plan in the direction of Florida's model is by leaning on our continuity of operations planning. That requires every agency to think through essential functions and alternate facilities, accessible communications and how to sustain operations for people who rely on those services, which naturally aligns with the emergency support function and recovery support function structure in a comprehensive emergency management plan. Because if each agency already knows its critical functions and continuity needs, including how it will meet disability and access and functional needs, then it becomes much easier to formalize, codify, and assign those responsibilities within a statewide plan.

So I think in short a robust continuity of operations planning framework would build some of that operational muscle and accountability that Oregon would allow a more comprehensive perspective that could work in Oregon. But it does require a legislative component, and that is something that I will need Kira's help with.

[Laughter]

AMY NICHOLAS: Thank you. We have somebody on the panel who is well versed in writing legislative language.

NATASHA FOX: Absolutely.

BETH MEYER: One thing I would like to add, this is Beth, if the CILs are in the state comprehensive emergency management plan as one of those NGO partners, in our state that means the CILs have access to free fuel. That means interpreters get free fuel to go out to wherever. That means also propane. That means they're able to fill up propane tanks and take them out to the communities so people can stay in their home, so they don't have to go into a shelter. Maybe they might need, might not have power for 2 weeks but then what are we doing?

If we don't have gas, because the CILs have such a little budget for fuel and gas, they could blow through that in like 2 days if there's a disaster.

So the centers for independent living receive a curfew pass which allows them to travel in the area that is impacted. We also have memorandums that CILs can go outside of their area if needed to help another CIL. If they go in there and they're able to fuel up, bring gas for generators and because the number one thing is our CILs are operating since people are leaving shelters so soon, people, we're trying to get the CILs up so that they're really acting like a generator station. And they have portable generators that they can take out to the community if there's someone that's not able to come in, they're driving in and charging up with whatever, whether durable medical equipment, CPAP machines. We have really cool solar panel generators that are really neat. And that you just lay the solar panels out. It's like a briefcase.

And those have been very helpful for keeping people at home. CILs are bringing water, food. They're just dropping it off because that keeps -- because they don't want to leave their home. You know, they might have left the home for safety, and now they're back. But during Hurricane Helene, I didn't have power for 2 weeks. So that's just the nature of it. You can expect 2 weeks out.

But our CILs have satellite phones, we can communicate immediately, and we have a good idea of what the needs are. But fuel is a big one, and by being a partner with the state, we had access to that.

GERMAN PARODI: This is German. I really want to go back to Natasha's point around when we are building access and functional needs into emergency operation plans, it's not about building a separate annex for ESF. No. It needs to be integrated into each and every one about how they are going to meet the needs of people with disabilities and people with access and functional needs.

Again and again, we see state plans that might have an annex that nobody ever opens with three pages that says barely anything and doesn't account for how each area. I've read plans that say in the morning and in the evening, they'll pick up the trash at the EOC. In the state plan! If you're going to be that detailed in the state plan, it needs to include how they're going to support people with disabilities.

AMY NICHOLAS: Kira, I do have a question for you. You did talk about the federal legislation that you've been working with Congress. Can you talk a little bit more about that? Where it's at, where it stands now, and what your hopes are or what the direction it's heading?

KIRA TILLER: Yeah, absolutely. So I can't speak directly on what's in the legislation, but -- until it's introduced. But I can speak on the direction that I think it makes sense to go in with federal legislation.

So I think there's really two avenues for this that make sense. I think the first avenue that makes sense for this that would kind of be the simplest and most straightforward would be going through IDEA. I'm sure many of you are familiar that in IDEA within IEPs, there's consideration section with supports that have to be discussed by the IEP team of whether or not the student needs those supports. So for this, if we were just going to add this, this would just be another line tacked on to the end of that. So it's a very simple, fits very neatly into the existing structure of IEPs and IDEA, and this would just be an additional consideration discussed by the IEP team. It wouldn't really add a lot of extra complexity or an extra section to the IEP; it would just fit into that existing section and it would also ensure that if a student doesn't need a plan, well, then that's easy. Then you just agree that the student and the family communicate that they don't need a plan, and move on.

And so that is kind of the first avenue.

The second avenue that could also make sense is going through ESEA or the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and through this, you could go through Title I part A which covers like funding grants and it kind of sets expectations for how states and districts will meet students' needs and ensure equitable access to education. So thought this would be a good place to put it.

And with this, we would just in that section essentially require states and LEAs or local education agencies to include emergency preparedness protocols. So both of these fitting into an existing framework, very simple and straightforward, and kind of makes a lot of sense in the existing legal framework.

So that is how I personally think it would make sense to go about it in federal legislation. But again, I can't -- I'm not saying that's what's in the language because I can't personally speak to anything that's in the bill until it's been introduced.

AMY NICHOLAS: Understood. Understood. I look forward to seeing the language and what it is.

KIRA TILLER: I will be sure to keep you all posted.

AMY NICHOLAS: One thing that I didn't say, this panel is a springboard for the emergency management tool kit. Tribal lands, states, territories, the whole gamut.

I would like you to take a few minutes to let me know what you think should be included in this tool kit.

NATASHA FOX: I'll go ahead, I guess. Just break the awkward silence. This is Natasha.

I myself would -- I'm thinking of this from my selfish benefit, for one. As someone who is still relatively new to the emergency management ecosystem and I would love to see a replicable model and framework reflected in state law.

In Oregon we are currently writing this from scratch, but it has proven to be a slow and heavy lift to engage the legislature in developing and funding a universal set of accessibility standards that can be applied across all of our 36 counties and 9 federally recognized tribes.

So a national tool kit that provides sample statutory language would be hugely beneficial to us in Oregon, as well as funding strategies. We've talked about this a lot this morning. And some implementation guidance that would help states move much more quickly and with greater consistency because the consistency is something we always lack.

And of course an equity coordinator or officer embedded in every ECC and EOC would be something that I think would be hugely beneficial.

BETH MEYER: Okay. I would also, this is Beth. For the tool kit, I think identifying partners. Identifying funding opportunities. Because -- and really kind of outline. I think there should be an opportunity for growth. Like a tool kit that takes you to where the state is. Not every state is ready to go. And they don't respond to disasters exactly the same.

But I think the focusing on some of the states are just getting, you know, experiencing unbelievable disasters. You know, looking at them for, you know, as you're doing, looking for some guidance for this. But I think you need to identify roles. It's hard to have a conversation with a CIL and not have any funding because they're losing money left and right. However, let's figure out how we can support it because they're doing it. They're doing the work. But they could do so much more. And having an expectation of encouraging state councils to collect the data. And the data is going to tell the story. The data, you know, we talked GIS mapping. People move after disasters. I find that very interesting. And we like to know where they move and where are they moving to and are they coming back. So population influx.

There's a lot of research that needs to go into it too. But supporting actions in this tool kit and laying out some possibility what they could do is going to be really important. And I think having a couple options is going to be critical. So very exciting.

LIDIA FONSECA: This is Lidia. So yes to both of them. And really what I imagine this tool kit to look like, what purpose does it serve and who is it going to serve most. This is going to go to states. Office of Emergency Management. How can they implement this. Right?

So I think focusing on that audience and what they need. Not all states and not all -- even if a state is coming in with what so much money can do or organizations for people with disabilities and what they do, that's not the same case throughout the entire state. So this tool kit of course needs to have definitions. Needs to have information about the different organizations out there and what they already do, right, what we've been talking about.

And then also provide examples of how it has worked in other areas so they can then see what this tool kit can potentially do for them. So ensuring that all of that is included in there.

And then I think as I've mentioned before, we have all the ingredients here at the table for the perfect recipe to ensure that this tool kit is a good roadmap of the guidance for the states to use to start moving forward in their comprehensive emergency management plan for each state.

GERMAN PARODI: This is German. All of them said great things. A few points to add. It's been mentioned, but finding ways to compensate through community-based organizations that are supporting the emergency management field and for the emergency management field to have clear ways understanding the obligations they need to meet and how to go about it.

And also would remiss me we don't mention adding mental health continuity models, concepts like crisis counseling, sensory rooms, options for existing care, and also serving the community to understand their access and functional needs. Not only ahead of time so you can learn what are their needs, what are the language needs in the community, but also soon after the disaster, sometimes the response goes on for months and not everyone has a way to provide their information. So finding ways to open up those ways of communication.

KIRA TILLER: Wow, you guys have such great recommendations and I guess I'm more on the education side of this. So kind of talking about schools, I think it's really important to kind of focus on the physical accessibility portion of this and guidance to states on how to implement accessible emergency evacuation equipment to school districts and the differing needs of school districts whether it's a more affluent suburban district or if it's maybe a more rural district that might need more guidance and funding and support. And how states can set implementation time lines with funding support and what that looks like for different regions.

And then surveys that school districts can administer to assess gaps in emergency preparedness in schools and having surveys not only for students and parents but also for teachers so, you know, questions like have you been asked whether you or your child needs emergency accommodations. If so, was the plan followed. How well was it followed. Have you or your child been meaningfully included in the process of developing that plan.

And then for teachers also, have they been meaningfully included in developing that plan and were they properly informed and supported in implementing that plan. And also in terms of emergency evacuation equipment, assessing whether the staff, the designated staff or personnel who are responsible for handling that, were they trained on how to use that. Because like for example we've been at -- this also goes to the university level and even assessing this at my own college. And I know that there have been like a lot of communication gaps with like emergency responders as well as safety personnel at the school on where evacuation chairs are located and how to use different emergency equipment, how to communicate that with the disabled people that they're assisting. So support in all of those things.

And also of course using like models, legislative models like the bill in Virginia as well as states like Maryland, New Jersey, and California, which have similar laws as well. And kind of providing those frameworks and the results from those states to other states and really facilitation between emergency management and state departments of education so they can communicate with IEP and 504 teams and give them guidance on how they can best implement emergency management and planning in IEPs and 504 plans.

SHAWN KENNEMER: So, can I add something?

AMY NICHOLAS: You can.

SHAWN KENNEMER: One of the areas I think we need to look at in developing the tool that often gets overlooked and I think it's one of the most important is every great plan, and if you talk to military, every battle plan goes out the door the minute the first shot is fired.

So any tool kit has to include stress testing the plan, adapting the plan, and then repeating the process. So without that, nothing happens. So if we're developing a tool kit, we have to stress it. I think that's the primary area that has to be done. As you say, if it has been stress tested for the example you gave, Kira, for the child in the school room, that person, the aide would have immediately gone there. But obviously it wasn't tested. It was a plan that nobody ever saw or read. And I think that's why we get caught up.

LIDIA FONSECA: That could be something great we could add in the tool kit, having a mock evacuation or whatever the case may be if something is happening in a school or if something is happening, a natural disaster, how to develop and start those mock situations.

AMY NICHOLAS: And FEMA used to do like mock disaster recovery. I don't think they had that in a number of years.

SHAWN KENNEMER: California, we do the annual shake out and it's become a joke. Literally. Because getting the employees on board, okay, get under your desk...

SASCHA BITTNER: It's ridiculous.

SHAWN KENNEMER: Right. And when it started, it was very good. But now --

SASCHA BITTNER: Yeah.

SHAWN KENNEMER: -- it's become a process we have to do and that's where it has to be a culture that we have to create and a buy in.

SASCHA BITTNER: Totally.

ANA TORRES-DAVIS: Dr. Fonseca, I appreciated the information about looking at the evacuation procedures and then trying to design them for everybody, because I know I have often thought what would happen to me, being in a wheelchair now, what would I do when everybody else runs out. You know, because I can't run, I can't hide... They'll see me. Right? They're going to see me. Neil's going to save me. I believe you.

But yeah, I've been in situations before when I've worked in other places and different employers. They always struggle with, what if you're upstairs, what do we do, what do people in wheelchairs do. What do people with other disabilities do. And it's always concerned me. So it's nice to know that somebody is thinking about, well, what do you do if you can't run, if you can't hide. What are some of the options for people.

And then to go through it, to do those exercises and see, what do people learn because you always learn something. Right? When you do those exercises, the first time at least.

SHAWN KENNEMER: If they're done correctly.

ANA TORRES-DAVIS: Yeah, you'll learn something. Someone will get left behind and people will see, oh, my goodness. This is something we have to address or how can we solve this problem, how can we be creative.

What I would like for them to do with me is to build a cardboard box about my size and I could just roll into that.

[Laughter]

No one is going to look in that. Okay. Different size boxes. But I wanted to throw that out.

[Laughter]

LIDIA FONSECA: This is Lidia. Thank you. I do want to add in that critical incident response training we were working on, we did get an opportunity to get people with disabilities as actors so that we can kind of do the process and we took pictures and video, because all of the active shooter training or critical response training us that out there, curriculum, marketing material, has all able-bodied people. So we wanted to get material out there that showed folks with disabilities and what they can do. So we're working on that as well.

NEIL ROMANO: I don't want to start another question because my colleagues are looking at me like, Neil, it's 5 after 12:00.

But I think it's important that we remember the communications aspect of the tool kit, whatever that might be. Obviously there's multiple, multiple tracks that need to be included in that.

The other thing from my point of view too, I've seen some very successful things when you also try to weave in as best you can private sector. And make them advocates as opposed to just being inactive in something like this.

So how do we add those to the tool kit? How do we develop, you know, communications and advocacy plan that works effectively with the communication.

I am from Florida and I have seen it with some remarkable hospitals and stuff that have done some great, great stuff. So it's something to keep in mind as we do this. The communication is, you know, I'm a communicator so it's right at the top of my list. But it's something that always has to be focused on very, very carefully.

Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you guys for a wonderful panel.

SASCHA BITTNER: I have one comment. One thing I worry about, when I'm alone in my house, if there's -- in San Francisco where I live, what we always worry about is an earthquake. So whenever I'm alone, I always worry about what if there's an earthquake and what if I can't communicate with my support people and what would I do, you know, so I think something around that might be good.

RISA RIFKIND: This is Risa. Thank you all for a wonderful panel. I appreciate your perspectives.

For the Council, for that tool kit, I love the idea of statutory language to be part of it. Policy recommendations. Clearly examples. Without that, it's not going to happen. Just my thoughts.

SHAWN KENNEMER: Right.

So we're good?

AMY NICHOLAS: I think we're good.

SHAWN KENNEMER: All right. I think we're beating that horse. Which is not always a bad thing.

But I really, before we close, I just wanted to thank once again, I mean, I've done it a couple times, the staff. There's one staff member that I think has gone an extra mile for this whole Council meeting being here and he doesn't get much credit. So Nick, on behalf of the Council, thank you for making possible the Zoom. If you saw the YouTube Zoom, the shots were amazing. I think everything went pretty well. We had microphone issues, but we won't blame that on Nick. It just happens.

As we say, if something doesn't go right, did you really have a meeting.

But other than that, with that, if there's nothing else, I will ask for a motion to adjourn.

SASCHA BITTNER: I so move.

SHAWN KENNEMER: Sascha says she moves because she's ready to go back to bed.

[Laughter]

Do I have a second?

All in favor, say aye.

And we are adjourned. Thank you.

SASCHA BITTNER: Thank you, everyone.

SHAWN KENNEMER: Thanks, Sascha.

SASCHA BITTNER: I'm sorry for all the technical difficulties on my end.

[Meeting ended at 12:13 p.m.]