

# FEMA providing COVID funeral assistance program

By **RACHEL SHUBIN**  
Special to the Star and Wave

A new program from the Federal Emergency Management Agency is helping ease the financial stress and burden caused by the pandemic by providing financial assistance to those who incurred coronavirus-related funeral expenses after Jan. 20, 2020.

The COVID-19 Funeral Assistance Program was created under the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021 and the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. Individuals who paid for funerals as a result of COVID-19 could receive as much as \$9,000 in reimbursement. President Joe Biden approved fund-

ing under this program. "We have been participating in monthly meetings with FEMA since they began this program earlier in the year," New Jersey State Funeral Directors Association Executive Director George Kelder said. "We receive updates from them as to its utilization and how we can better share this information with families."

As of a report dated Sept. 3, Kelder said FEMA has paid out about \$50 million to families who have registered for the program.

"The typical New Jersey family has received \$6,938 to date, but you're eligible up to \$9,000," he said. "The report acknowledged from the start of the pandemic, there were 25,108

eligible deaths and as of that same date 11,324 families have registered with FEMA. That's a 45 percent response rate, which is unbelievable."

Kelder explained further that the rate was not higher because FEMA does not reimburse individuals who have received death benefits through an insurance policy. As a result, others may not need assistance, he said.

"This program has been phenomenal given the circumstances," he said. "This is going to help individuals who had to borrow money or dig into savings accounts because it was a catastrophic, unexpected death or there were multiple family deaths from COVID-19."

To apply for the program, individuals work with FEMA directly to create an application. Certain documents are required, including death certificates, background documentation, paid or outstanding bills and proof of relationship to the deceased. Additional signed statements and documents may be required depending on the information on the death certificate.

"FEMA quickly turns the paperwork into payment provided that the returned registrations are not missing documents, which halt everything," Kelder said. "The lowest rejection in the state of New Jersey is due to duplicate applications."

A single individual

from a family can submit one application per family member and include a co-applicant on an application. FEMA's website states that those who incurred COVID-19-related funeral expenses for more than one individual may receive a maximum of \$35,500 per application per state where the applicant incurred funeral expenses for multiple deceased individuals. Deaths outside the U.S., U.S. territories or District of Columbia are not included in the assistance program.

The funeral assistance program typically includes but is not limited to funeral services, cremation, interment, transportation, transfer of remains, casket or urn, burial plot or

cremation niche, marker or headstone, clergy or officiant services, arrangements, etc.

"When the program first came out, about a year after the start of the pandemic, so many of our funeral homes sent letters or emails to families when they knew the cause of death was from COVID-19," Kelder said. "They told them we are not certain if you're eligible but this is available to you."

Kelder said the funeral assistance program has been beneficial and a good follow-up for funeral directors to reach out to their families.

For more information, visit [fema.gov/disaster/coronavirus/economic/funeral-assistance](https://fema.gov/disaster/coronavirus/economic/funeral-assistance).

## EMS arrived in 4 minutes

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An Inspira ambulance was dispatched at 5:38 p.m. and arrived on scene at 5:50 p.m.

A Wildwood Crest Rescue Squad ambulance was dispatched at 5:42.07 and arrived on scene at 5:43:10.

Lower Township police were dispatched at 5:38 p.m. and arrived on scene at 5:45 p.m.

Diamond Beach Citizen's Action Group President James Sanford has been pressuring Township Council to reach a mutual aid agreement with Wildwood Crest to provide ambulance service, saying

response time would be 3 to 4 minutes and could have life-and-death consequences.

But Laffey said the response time depends on availability.

"Wildwood Crest has one ambulance working," Laffey said. "If they're not there, Inspira's coming anyway if we had a deal with them, if we contract them to provide service instead of Inspira."

He said Inspira has been in the township only since June and would get "better and better at what they do."

Laffey said the state's recommendation for re-

sponse time for basic life support and advanced life support calls is 15 minutes or less.

He said not every call is an emergency or life-threatening situation.

Inspira's benchmark is 90 percent of calls would be responded to in 8 minutes or less, striving for 12 minutes or less on the remaining 10 percent of calls, Laffey said.

"They've hit that benchmark on average since they've started," he said.

"We count on some of our counterparts to provide mutual aid for us, whether it's Cape May, Wildwood Crest ... and

Wildwood Crest has been very good to us helping us and we do the same, as well as Middle," Laffey said.

Lower Township has an agreement with Wildwood Crest to provide fire service to Diamond Beach but

that does not include ambulance service, he said. At issue is that firetrucks and ambulances respond from the county airport in Erma and must use the Middle Thorofare Bridge to reach Diamond Beach.

Laffey said he "would never say never" on signing an agreement with Wildwood Crest for EMS. He said the government is trying to provide the best service that it can to all areas of the township.

## Jitney ridership plummets in summer 2021

By **JACK FICHTER**  
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Jitney ridership fell in the city this summer, but it may be attributable to the public's fear of using public transportation during the COVID pandemic.

Councilman Chris Bezaire said 2019 jitney ridership numbers supplied by the Atlantic City Jitney Association showed 49,445 passengers. The service ran June 21 to Sept. 2 and the weekend of Sept. 6-8.

He said he had some questions about the numbers.

"Certain weeks there were higher numbers on a Tuesday than a Saturday," he said.

Bezaire said the cost of the jitney service in 2019 was \$107,420, which equates to \$2.17 per passenger. Earlier that year, the city raised parking meter rates around the Washington Street Mall from \$1 per hour to \$2 per hour, taking in an additional \$450,000 in revenue as a result and offsetting the expense of jitney service.

Council awarded a contract in July to Sea Isle City Transit (SIC), of Atlantic City, at a cost of \$400 per day per vehicle.

This summer, jitney service ran July 9 to Sept. 5 and weekends through Sept. 26 with a total of 18,333 passengers at a total cost of \$71,200. He said while there was a savings of more than \$36,000 this year, the per-passenger cost rose to \$3.88 per passenger.

"I think COVID affected those numbers and there was a huge aversion to mass transportation nationwide, which hindered those numbers," Bezaire said. "I'm still a firm believer the service is something that is needed in town."

He said the city has re-established a public transit service. Bezaire said he hopes for a more environ-

mentally friendly transportation service in the future that could help qualify the city for state and federal grants to purchase vehicles.

More appropriate vehicles fitting in with the Victorian charm of Cape May could be purchased as an alternative to jitneys, he suggested.

The service did not operate in 2020.

### TIDES: Oct. 13-20, 2021

DATE	HIGH		LOW	
	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.
13	2:19	2:50	8:04	9:13
14	3:36	4:00	9:17	10:17
15	4:45	5:04	10:26	11:15
16	5:44	5:59	11:27	
17	6:33	6:47	12:05	12:21
18	7:17	7:30	12:48	1:09
19	7:56	8:10	1:28	1:53
20	8:32	8:48	2:05	2:34

### MOON PHASES

First quarter, Oct. 13 • full moon, Oct. 20

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