

NEWS & INSIGHTS

FEMA changes COVID-19 funeral assistance policy

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The below information is current as of the publication date listed. Because COVID-19 response measures on all fronts are continually evolving, clients should stay alert to new developments and consult with counsel on any critical questions.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has changed its COVID-19 funeral assistance policy to ease the burden of proving a death was COVID-related.

Earlier this year, FEMA began implementing a program to provide financial assistance for COVID-19 related funeral

expenses. We summarized the program [here](#). FEMA's original policy required a death certificate attributing the death to COVID-19 for an applicant to be eligible for assistance.

Now, per FEMA's [amended policy](#), an applicant may instead submit a death certificate that lacks clear attribution to COVID-19 along with a letter signed by the certifying official on the death certificate, medical examiner, or coroner listing COVID-19 as a cause or contributing cause of death. The attribution letter must provide an additional explanation or causal pathway, linking the cause of death on the death certificate with COVID-19.

A death certificate and attribution letter will be accepted only for deaths occurring between January 20, 2020 and May 16, 2020. FEMA [reasoned](#) that the largest number of undiagnosed COVID-19 cases likely happened early in the pandemic and prior to implementation of the CDC's guidance on death certification related to COVID-19.

Other requirements of the funeral assistance program remain unchanged.

The State Registrar has also provided [guidance](#) on how a death certificate may be amended to include COVID-19 as a cause of death.

Saxton & Stump attorney [Jason Benion](#) is available to assist death care businesses and professionals with these and other issues regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

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