

The Access and Functional Needs (AFN) Minute

October 14, 2025

Welcome!

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Message from the Chief



All,

October marks the 80th anniversary of National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), a time to recognize the vital contributions of people with disabilities in strengthening our workforce, our communities, and our collective future. This year's theme, *"Celebrating Value and Talent,"* reminds us that diversity is not just something to honor, but something to actively include and empower.

At the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), inclusion is at the heart of everything we do. Through the work of the Office of Access and Functional Needs (OAFN), we see every day how people with disabilities strengthen the entire emergency management system. The community brings lived experience, creativity, and problem-solving skills that make plans, programs, and responses more effective.

Whether developing inclusive evacuation strategies, ensuring services are accessible, or shaping communication plans that reach every Californian, we help our teams see challenges and opportunities through a broader and more human lens. The impact is clear: when people with disabilities are part of the process, the system works better for everyone. Our insights help anticipate needs, close gaps, and build an emergency management framework rooted in inclusion and resilience.

As we celebrate National Disability Employment Awareness Month, let's recommit to fostering workplaces that value and support all abilities. After all, the strength of California's emergency management system depends not just on our expertise, but on our willingness to listen, learn, and include every voice at the table.

Thank you for joining me on this mission!

-Vance

L. Vance Taylor

Chief, Office of Access and Functional Needs
California Governor's Office of Emergency Services

**Expanding Access Through Innovation: The
Updated Disaster Response Interpreter Program**



An American Sign Language Interpreter instructing participants at the Disaster Response Interpreter (DRI) training in Los Angeles

The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) and its Office of Access and Functional Needs (OAFN) launched the first delivery of the newly updated Disaster Response Interpreter (DRI) Program curriculum. This innovative credentialing program combines online coursework with in-person instruction to create a truly hybrid learning experience that is both flexible and effective for American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters across California.

Developed in partnership with [NorCal Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing](#), the updated DRI Program integrates digital learning modules with hands-on workshops designed to build real-world readiness. The first hybrid session was hosted at the [Greater Los Angeles Agency on Deafness \(GLAD\)](#).

A total of 25 experienced American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters participated, bringing expertise from community, medical, and emergency response settings. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with participants praising the engaging hybrid format, practical exercises, and strong sense of collaboration throughout the course.

To participate in the DRI Program, interpreters must meet the following criteria:

- **Certification:** NAD Level 3–5; RID CDI, CI/CT, IC/TC, CSC, MCSC, SC:L; NIC Generalist, Advanced, or Master Level; or be a Qualified Deaf Interpreter with attestation from a California Deaf Access Program partner agency.
- **Experience:** Minimum of five years (ten preferred) of interpreting experience in community, medical, law enforcement, mental health, or emergency settings.

- **Availability:** Flexibility and willingness to respond during emergency or disaster events.
- **Background Check:** Ability to pass a Department of Justice background check.
- **Affiliation:** Employment or contract with a DRI Partner Deaf Access Program agency.

By modernizing the DRI Program, Cal OES and OAFN are strengthening California's capacity to ensure accessible, reliable communication during disasters. This renewed focus on training excellence and collaboration with the deaf and interpreting communities reflects our shared commitment to building a more inclusive and resilient emergency management system for all Californians.

Get Ready to ShakeOut: California's 2025 Earthquake Preparedness Tour



The Great Shakeout Tour Banner

It's that time of year again! The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) is gearing up for the 2025 Great California ShakeOut, the state's largest earthquake preparedness event. Practicing how to stay safe during an earthquake doesn't have to be scary!

Whether you're at work, school, or home – Join millions of Californians statewide on **Thursday, October 16th at 10:16am** for the Great California ShakeOut drill.

Learn more and get involved at
<https://www.ShakeOut.org/California>

Cal OES is kicking off the Great California ShakeOut Tour with exciting stops across the state:

Wednesday, October 15
California State University, Fullerton (Pollak Library)

800 North State College Boulevard, Fullerton, CA 92831
6 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Thursday, October 16
San Diego Waterfront Park
1600 Pacific Highway, San Diego, CA 92101
6 a.m. – 1 p.m.



The cover of the Earthquake Readiness Guide

Preparing for earthquakes can feel intimidating, but it doesn't have to! Download the [Cal OES Earthquake Readiness Guide](#) to learn how to build a plan, secure your space, and protect yourself with confidence. Taking small, simple steps can make a big difference in keeping you and your loved ones safe when earthquake strike.

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