



# KINGS NETWORK NEWS



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## PROJECT ROOMKEY: KINGS COUNTY FACES FALLOUT FROM FEMA FUNDING DELAYS



At the recent Kings County Board of Supervisors meeting held on March 11, 2025, county officials provided critical updates on the ongoing issues surrounding Project Roomkey, a state initiative aimed at housing vulnerable individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic. The discussion revealed significant financial challenges stemming from FEMA's delayed and retroactively altered reimbursement policies, leaving the county scrambling to cover millions in unexpected costs.

Project Roomkey was launched in April 2020, with Kings County securing two sites—the Holiday Lodge and Stardust Motel—to provide shelter for homeless individuals at high risk of contracting COVID-19. The county filed claims with FEMA totaling nearly \$8 million, of which only \$3.3 million had been reimbursed as of early 2023. Despite following all necessary procedures and documentation, the remaining \$4.7 million in federal aid was placed on indefinite hold, prompting frustration among county officials.

In October 2023, FEMA issued a letter retroactively limiting reimbursement eligibility, restricting extended stays beyond 20 days for high-risk individuals—a stark departure from previous guidance. This sudden shift jeopardized millions in funding for [Kings County](#) and other jurisdictions that had operated under the initial rules.

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"We followed the process they gave us, and then they changed the rules after the fact," a county official remarked during the meeting.

Determined not to let the county absorb these staggering costs, local leaders, alongside the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), engaged in an intense advocacy effort. Their persistence paid off. On January 31, 2025, [Kings County](#) finally received the remaining reimbursement funds, totaling approximately \$4.2 million. However, the delay forced the [county's Human Services](#) Agency (HSA) to absorb over \$426,000 in unreimbursed costs.

The Board of Supervisors meeting underscored broader concerns about FEMA's bureaucratic hurdles, which continue to impact [Kings County's](#) disaster recovery efforts. While Project Roomkey funds have now been accounted for, the county remains entangled in another FEMA battle—this time over \$21.3 million in unresolved claims related to damage from the 2023 winter storms.

[Kings County](#) officials remain committed to advocating for their fair share of disaster relief funds, emphasizing the need for transparency and consistency in federal reimbursements. As they prepare for future emergencies, local [leaders](#) stress that federal agencies must uphold their commitments to rural communities that rely on these programs for survival.

The Project Roomkey ordeal may be resolved, but its financial and bureaucratic aftershocks serve as a cautionary tale for [Kings County](#) and beyond.