



## **Testimony for the House Appropriations Committee**

**February 21, 2025**

Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency

David R. Padfield, Director

Good afternoon, Chairman Harris, Chairman Struzzi, and members of the House Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) 2025-2026 budget request. Joining me today is Jeff Boyle, Executive Deputy Director.

PEMA, while relatively small in comparison to other state agencies, has a tremendous responsibility when it comes to serving the Commonwealth. Our agency is responsible for helping communities and individuals mitigate against, prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies and other significant events; and our duties are vast and encompass the entire scope of emergency management functions. I would like to provide just a few recent examples of the important work our agency does that impacts Pennsylvanians everyday:

Communities throughout Pennsylvania were significantly impacted by Tropical Storm Debby. Our agency has and continues to support key response and recovery activities to assist these communities, for example:

- Tioga County requested the assistance of the Pennsylvania All-Hazards Incident Management Team or PA-IMT. The PA-IMT is a special response team led by PEMA that will augment municipal and county personnel to assist in response and recovery operations. The PA-IMT helped manage and supervise the removal of over 1,300 tons of flood-generated household waste such as water heaters, carpeting, furniture, drywall, and other construction debris. The team oversaw intake, storage, and distribution of the overwhelming amount of donations that poured in from all over Pennsylvania and New York. The team also coordinated a community meeting to provide information to affected residents and businesses and Public Information Officers on the team helped facilitate the timely distribution of critical safety and recovery information. The IMT also provided planning support to the Philadelphia Office of Emergency Management following the plane crash at the end of January.
- The water service of 42,000 Cumberland and York County customers was impacted following a water main break during the storm. Our team worked closely with our private industry partners to obtain and help coordinate the distribution of water to impacted households until service was restored.
- PEMA's Recovery team established Multi-Agency Resource Centers (MARC) in the four most impacted counties immediately after the disaster to assist impacted residents, businesses and the agricultural community with immediate needs and is currently working closely with 13 counties impacted by Tropical Storm Debby and the federal government to restore critical public infrastructure back to pre-disaster conditions. The Recovery team also did great work by securing over \$12 million in federal assistance to assist individuals and households in Lycoming, Potter, Tioga, and Union counties with repairing damage to their homes and other support to return to normalcy. PEMA also administers the State Disaster Recovery Assistance Program (DRAP). DRAP is designed to support disaster survivors when other local, state, federal, non-governmental, or private aid is not available to assist them, and the associated losses are not covered by insurance.
- Following a federally declared disaster, states typically receive hazard mitigation funding from the federal government to fund a share of hazard mitigation projects to minimize the impact of future disasters and reduce loss of life and property. PEMA's Hazard Mitigation team is nationally recognized, and their work has led to Pennsylvania being one of sixteen states with enhanced State Hazard Mitigation Plan status. Achieving this status means the

Commonwealth receives additional hazard mitigation funding following a federally declared disaster. Our team puts this funding to great use and works with communities across the Commonwealth to take actions that reduce loss of life and property by minimizing the impact of future disasters such as elevating homes in flood prone areas, landslide mitigation, reducing ice jam flooding, purchasing properties in floodplains to prevent development, and other types of mitigation projects. Our mitigation team is currently coordinating with communities across Pennsylvania to pursue projects with hazard mitigation funding following the federal disaster declaration related to Tropical Storm Debby.

These are only a subset of activities our agency supports which are driven by one event. Our agency supports multiple events concurrently while also performing many other daily emergency management activities such as planning, training, incident monitoring and alerting, flood plain management, technological hazards, 911, grant administration, and more.

## **2025-2026 Budget**

The 2025-2026 budget proposal will allow our agency to maintain a level of preparedness and response as we continue to strive to meet our obligations to people of the Commonwealth.

PEMA is responsible for coordinating the state agency response and support to county and local governments in response to emergencies including natural disasters, acts of terrorism, or other human-made disasters. These efforts typically occur in the Commonwealth Response Coordination Center (CRCC) and Commonwealth Watch and Warning Center (CWWC). The CRCC has been activated regularly in 2025 so far to support a variety of incidents across the Commonwealth. Notable items from PEMA's budget request include a \$7.1 million increase to PEMA's General Government Operations Fund. This increase is primarily related to a life-cycle replacement of information technology and audio-visual systems as well as facility upgrades in the CRCC and CWWC. The increase also plans for increases in salaries and benefits as well as planned increases in annual contracts and utility costs.

The budget request includes a decrease in disaster relief appropriations due to our team completing public assistance and hazard mitigation projects from previous federally declared disasters, which results in the need for less spending authority in this area.

Below are key initiatives and priorities that are the framework of the Agency's mission and provide better preparation for any disaster or emergency event.

## **911**

Proactive measures were taken by the General Assembly and Governor to increase the capabilities of Pennsylvania's 911 system and to implement Next Generation 911 (NG911) with the passage of Act 12 of 2015 (Act 12), which constituted a full rewrite of Chapter 53 of Title 35. PEMA was responsible for implementing key provisions of the law and, by working closely with our county partners and the 911 Advisory Board, implemented strong oversight, emphasized transparency, and managed 911 costs while incentivizing consolidation of 911 systems and technology. Four

911 center consolidations have occurred since 2016. Pennsylvania is one of thirteen states with fewer 911 centers than there are counties. Today, fifty-four 911 centers are participating in a shared/regional project to find cost and/or operational efficiencies.

PEMA coordinated and managed the largest technological upgrade in the history of Pennsylvania's 911 system with the implementation of the NG911 system. The NG911 system has been in operation since September 2022 and is our resident's lifeline for getting help in emergencies. On average, the NG911 system handles over 19,500 emergency calls every day in the Commonwealth to demonstrate the importance of this infrastructure. It's important to note that PEMA negotiated a strong contract for NG911 service where annual recurring costs for a robust service are fixed through December 2030.

These efforts are paying off. 911 system costs increased by 6.3% annually prior to Act 12; however, the rate of increase has been reduced to 4.5% annually on average between 2016 and 2023 while also greatly increasing the capabilities of the 911 system.

Act 147 of 2024 was an initial step towards updating Chapter 53 of Title 35 to reflect Pennsylvania's transition from analog Enhanced 911 service to digital NG911 service. Additional legislative work is needed to update other soon-to-be obsolete provisions due to Pennsylvania's transition to NG911, to define Pennsylvania considerations related to newly adopted federal rules for NG911, and to keep pace with rapidly changing consumer technology. In addition, the \$1.95 fee is scheduled to sunset in January 2026. The 911 fee is the primary funding source for Pennsylvania's 911 system. A key focus of 911 system stakeholders is to reauthorize the 911 fee prior to the sunset date.

### **Modernize Emergency Management**

Looking ahead, Emergency Management has never been more critical in Pennsylvania as our communities face occurrences of highly localized and catastrophic disasters each year. Pennsylvania will also be in the national spotlight with many notable events in 2025 and 2026 that will stretch the entire depth and breadth of resources at all levels of government.

However, Pennsylvania's emergency managers are facing some notable challenges such as decades-old guiding legislation and decreasing federal funding while the workload is anticipated to increase looking ahead. For example, Pennsylvania's annual allocation of State Homeland Security Grant Program Funding has decreased from over \$30 million in 2008 to \$7 million in 2024. The homeland security grant program is a primary funding source for planning, training, exercises, and equipment for our counties and regional counter-terrorism task forces.

Chapters 73 and 75 of Title 35 define the responsibilities for emergency management at the state, county, and local government. These Chapters were added to Title 35 in 1978 while emergency management has changed significantly since that time. The law is clear that the direction of disaster emergency management services is the responsibility of the lowest level of government affected. However, the funding mechanisms for emergency management are the complete opposite with the majority of funding coming from the federal government. For example, if you overlook funding for the Office of the State Fire Commissioner and 911 in PEMA's budget request,

State funds will cover 5% of emergency management costs in Pennsylvania with the remaining 95% coming from federal funds.

The work to update Chapter 53 of Title 35 had a significant impact on Pennsylvania's 911 system. A similar effort to update to Chapters 73 and 75 of Title 35 in a few key areas would have a notable impact on emergency management at the state, county, and local levels. First, modernizing membership of the Emergency Management Council and its duties would enhance planning and coordination among emergency management stakeholders for the optimal use of limited funding and resources. Updating these Chapters to facilitate the pre-staging of teams, equipment or other resources in advance of a known, significant hazard, such as an approaching hurricane, or preplanned event would greatly enhance response operations in the Commonwealth. Also, adjustments to maximize the use of funding available in the current law would have notable benefits for planning, mitigation and disaster response at the state, county, and local levels.

### **Enhance Hazardous Materials Response**

In 2024, there were 1,362 incidents reported to PEMA that involved hazardous materials. The Hazardous Material Emergency Planning and Response Act (Act 165 of 1990) outlines roles and responsibilities for hazardous materials response in Pennsylvania. Each county is responsible for providing a hazardous materials response capability in their jurisdiction by either operating or contracting with a certified hazardous materials response team.

Our counties are facing some challenges with maintaining a hazardous materials response capability due to contractors no longer providing this service or challenges sustaining their own hazardous materials response team. While Act 165 of 1990 has been beneficial with supporting county hazardous material response capabilities, it is necessary to modernize the law to reflect today's operating environment and enhance support to ensure a robust capability exists across the Commonwealth.

In closing, on behalf of Governor Shapiro, I thank you Chairman Harris, Chairman Struzzi, and members of the Committee, for your support of PEMA and our partners in public safety across the Commonwealth. This budget will allow PEMA to provide the utmost level of support to the counties, stakeholder organizations, and residents of the Commonwealth. I appreciate the opportunity to appear here today and am happy to answer any questions you have.