



Pennsylvania
Emergency Management Agency

Testimony for the House Appropriations Committee

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Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency

David R. Padfield, Director

Chairman Harris, Chairman Struzzi and members of the House Appropriations Committee:

My name is Randy Padfield, the Director of the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA). Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding Governor Shapiro's proposed 2026-2027 budget and what it means for emergency management across Pennsylvania. Joining me today is Jeff Boyle, Executive Deputy Director.

PEMA's mission is to help people and communities before, during, and after disasters and other emergencies. Our agency's responsibilities under Title 35 are extensive and touch all phases of emergency management to include preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation. I would like to provide just a few recent examples of the important work our agency does that is supported by the budget and impacts Pennsylvanians every day.

- **Mitigation:** Our team worked with communities impacted by Tropical Storm Debby to secure additional funding for hazard mitigation work, that directly reduces future risk, as part of efforts to rebuild public infrastructure. FEMA indicated that 25% of approved projects across the country receive additional mitigation funding on average for a disaster. In Pennsylvania, 75% of approved public infrastructure projects for Tropical Storm Debby received additional hazard mitigation funding, well above the national average.
- **Preparedness:** PEMA routinely facilitates planning with state and local stakeholders to assess risks, evaluate capabilities, identify gaps, establish capability targets, and administer grants to increase capabilities and responsiveness. PEMA administers approximately 33 federal and state grant programs to support emergency management and public safety activities across the Commonwealth. Our team uses funds to support exercises in the counties surrounding nuclear power plants to ensure first responders are trained should an incident occur. Additionally, several tabletop exercises and planning workshops have been held to work through scenarios in advance of planned events as well as based on the common threats that impact the Commonwealth.
- **Response:** A few recent examples include the activation of the Commonwealth Response Coordination Center to support response operations related to the winter storm in January. PEMA worked with PennDOT and the State Police to ensure Commonwealth highways remained safe for travelers and emergency responders. The Pennsylvania Incident Management Team, administered by PEMA, provided operational planning support to the City of Philadelphia to prepare for impacts of the storm. PEMA also provided logistics and GIS personnel to Alaska via the Emergency Management Assistance Compact to support response and recovery efforts from Typhoon Halong that impacted that state in October 2025.
- **Recovery:** PEMA first deployed the Disaster Recovery Assistance Program (D-RAP) in mid-2023 to provide disaster relief to qualified, low-income individuals when other local, state, federal, non-governmental, or private aid is not available to assist victims of disasters. Since the inception of the program, PEMA has been able to assist 82 households recovering from disasters who otherwise would have had limited to no resources for home repairs, temporary housing, or to replace essential personal property. The average D-RAP award per household is \$5,846. In

comparison, according to a 2025 study by the Congressional Research Office, FEMA's Individuals and Households Program average \$3,446 per household¹.

- **911:** Under the Federal Communications Commission rules, PEMA serves as the 911 Authority for Pennsylvania's next generation 911 (NG911) system. The NG911 system has been in operation since September 2022. The system serves as a lifeline to emergency services for Pennsylvania residents and currently handles over 20,000 emergency calls every day across the entire Commonwealth.

In the coming months, the Commonwealth will be a primary host to a variety of events, including America's 250th Anniversary. Multiple cities across the Commonwealth will host large-scale events that will attract people from across the nation and around the globe. These include the FIFA World Cup matches at Lincoln Financial Field in Philadelphia, America 250 celebrations across Pennsylvania, the NFL draft in Pittsburgh, and the MLB All-Star game at Citizens Bank Park in Philadelphia. In addition to planning, our agency is responsible for administering FEMA's FIFA World Cup Grant Program and Counter-Unmanned Aircraft Systems Grant Programs in support of jurisdictions hosting eligible events. PEMA remains focused on supporting these events and simultaneously preparing for disasters or emergencies that may impact the Commonwealth throughout the year.

The Governor's 2026-2027 budget proposal allows our agency to maintain a high level of preparedness and responsiveness to meet our obligations to the people of the Commonwealth. Historically, 90% of funding our agency utilizes for emergency management functions are derived from the federal government. These funding streams include the Homeland Security Grant programs, mitigation programs, preparedness grants, and disaster recovery reimbursements.

Under the current federal administration, FEMA has faced significant funding and staffing challenges that raise concerns about their capacity to fulfill the agency's mission. Currently, changes are being made to FEMA that shift roles and responsibilities for emergency management to state, county, and local governments. As a result, the Commonwealth will likely be more responsible to provide adequate resources when planning for emergencies. For example:

- FEMA has recommended increasing the qualifying thresholds of damages a state must incur to request a federal major disaster declaration. States, such as Maryland, have recently suffered disasters and damages that far exceeded qualifying thresholds for assistance, but requests for federal Disaster Declarations have been denied.
- FEMA announced they will not be performing door-to-door canvassing or operating Disaster Resource Centers to register impacted residents after a disaster. A Disaster Resource Center is an accessible facility or mobile office where survivors can register for disaster assistance programs. The most recent example of the value of door-to-door canvassing and an operational Disaster Resource Center was the coordinated response for Individual Assistance immediately after Tropical Storm Debby that impacted Indiana, Lycoming, Potter, Tioga, and Union Counties. This

¹ <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF13127>

change will require state, county, and local governments to be responsible for these efforts going forward.

- Federal funding for emergency management continues to steadily decrease. Pennsylvania's Homeland Security Grant Program award was \$30 million in 2008 federal year compared to \$9 million in 2025.
- Changes in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Terms and Conditions, the shortening of Periods of Performance for FEMA grant awards, and the inclusion of additional requirements in FEMA grant awards create significant limitations in the administration of many of the federal grant programs for state, county, and local partners.

FEMA staffing has been hit by agency workers leaving due to buyouts, non-renewal of contracts, and layoffs, at a time when disaster response is rising. In addition to staffing issues, federal disaster programs and grant funding have been scaled back or reprioritized. The US Department of Homeland Security has adopted a policy requiring the Secretary to approve any expense over \$100,000. This policy has created a backlog of nearly \$700 million in disaster and hazard mitigation grant reimbursements due to Pennsylvania. The backlog is \$17 billion nationally. These shifts have occurred in the context of broader federal budget debates and efforts to restructure federal emergency response authorities, contributing to the uncertainty of FEMA's future.

Funding for the US Department of Homeland Security, which houses FEMA, continues to face serious challenges. Recent state budget impasses and the current federal government shutdown had immediate and tangible consequences for emergency management and national readiness. FEMA's Grant Outcomes system is offline, leaving millions of dollars unable to reach emergency managers at the county and local level, as well as delaying or impacting mitigation, preparedness, and recovery activities.

PEMA is focused on planning and preparing for changes in responsibilities for mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. A foundational need is to modernize Chapters 73 and 75 of Title 35 to meet the changing needs of Pennsylvania's emergency management system. In the near term, the Commonwealth cannot sit idly by and have a reactionary stance in emergency management. This is why Governor Shapiro has proposed setting aside \$100 million into the new Federal Response Fund. Having these funds available for agencies to be able to draw down due to federal inaction or reduction in funds is vital to sustaining the critical programs that protect Pennsylvanians. These funds would help support our Commonwealth adapt in a changing emergency management environment.

As we know, disasters do not wait for federal budget negotiations. Pennsylvania must be positioned to respond immediately and recover effectively. The Governor's proposal ensures we remain prepared, financially stable, and ready to protect our communities.

Thank you for your attention and we look forward to your questions.