



**pennsylvania**  
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

**Testimony for the House Appropriations Committee**

**February 26, 2020**

Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency

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Chairman Saylor, Chairman Bradford, and members of the House Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) 2020-2021 budget request. Joining me today is Jeff Thomas, Executive Deputy Director, and Jeff Boyle, Deputy Director for 9-1-1.

While we are a smaller agency, the mission we take on is extremely important and multi-faceted. While our primary day-to-day function is usually focused on preparedness, mitigation, and on-going recovery activities, which involves the administration of 12 federal grant programs, PEMA is also responsible for coordinating the state agency response and support to county/local governments in response to human-caused and natural disasters and other emergencies. PEMA fulfills its mission while always seeking greater efficiencies to improve our delivery to our primary customers, the 67 counties in the commonwealth. The majority of our 190 plus highly trained staff, not only have their normal day-to-day job in the primary emergency management areas of preparedness, response, recovery, mitigation, as well as the 9-1-1 program; they staff the Commonwealth Response Coordination Center (CRCC), County Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs), or the site of the disaster or emergency, as needed, when a statewide emergency or disaster occurs.

PEMA is requesting \$141.498 million for the 2020-2021 fiscal year. This figure is comprised of \$13.908 million in state funds and \$127.5 million in federal funds. This represents a \$387,000 increase in state funding from fiscal year 2019-2020, or 2.86 percent, driven by personnel and operation costs. While the agency's state budget allocation is less than one percent of the General

Fund budget, the dollars support the operations of the agency and allow us to administer our state/federal grant programs which support state and local efforts to prevent and prepare for the threats and hazards we face.

PEMA is committed to enhancing current partnerships and continuing to build new, collaborative, transparent, and cohesive relationships with the private sector and public safety organizations at the federal, state, county, and local levels. These relationships are key in assuring a whole community approach to disaster preparedness, response and recovery operations, as well as building community resiliency throughout the Commonwealth.

The 2020-2021 budget allocated to PEMA will allow us to maintain a level of preparedness and response as we continue to strive to meet our obligations to the citizens of the Commonwealth and ensure that PEMA is an example of “Government That Works.” 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.

### **Highlights**

Calendar year 2019 was the seventh wettest year on record for Pennsylvania with 50.9 inches of rain. Many of these events continued the pattern of receiving significant amounts of rain over short durations resulting in flash flooding throughout the Commonwealth. While these events are devastating to the impacted communities, none rose to the federal thresholds for disaster

declarations for either Public or Individual Assistance. In Calendar year 2019, the Commonwealth recorded 72 incidents statewide where weather related damage occurred that resulted in damage assessments being conducted by municipalities. These incidents resulted in varying degrees of damages to 1,313 residential homes and seven U.S Small Business Administration Disaster Declarations resulting in \$3.7 million of approved low interest loans to individuals and businesses to aid with the recovery from these events.

In 2019, PEMA completed a multi-year effort to have all 67 counties achieve StormReady status becoming only the 6<sup>th</sup> state in the nation to do be recognized by the National Weather Service. StormReady uses a grassroots approach to help communities take new, proactive approaches to improve their hazardous weather operations. PEMA also received a national award from the Homeland Security Information Network (HSIN). The Gold Best of HSIN in Interagency Collaboration award was awarded to PEMA, topping the over 300 entries, for the development of the Commonwealth's Election Dashboard. The dashboard was utilized in the 2019 primary and general elections, which is a secure platform allowing the real time collaboration between PEMA, the Department of State, and federal and local governments working to ensure safe and secure voting opportunities for citizens of the Commonwealth.

Partnering with other state agencies, PEMA is enhancing our ability to assess, interpret and forecast meteorological data. In addition to a meteorologist, the agency is looking to upgrade and enhance data tools and develop the Keystone Mesoscale Network (MESONET) to provide early

warning on floods, and impacts of weather systems as we continue to integrate innovative technology into our daily operations.

Pennsylvania's Emergency Management Services Code, Title 35, defines the agency's responsibilities for emergency management before, during and after a disaster event. The agency has been operating under the current legislation for over 20 years. In that time, there have been numerous changes in our national and state public safety structure which necessitates changes to Title 35 such as the creation of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the formation of the Commonwealth's nine Regional Task Forces, the federal National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the Incident Command System (ICS).

An update to Title 35 will allow the agency to utilize the capabilities of Pennsylvania's highly trained specialized response teams for incidents within the state as well as requests for assistance received from other states through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC). Our commitment is to continue working with our Emergency Management community and the standing committee chairs to pursue a re-write to Title 35 that will provide a more efficient and effective way for the Commonwealth and local governments to prepare for and respond to all-hazards.

## **Strategic Priorities**

PEMA's current Strategic Plan ended with calendar year 2019. The agency is collectively working on developing the next Strategic Plan that will cover years 2020-2023. The agency remains focused on ensuring that it invests and operates in a cohesive, unified fashion, while making decisions that are transparent and results driven. The Strategic Plan represents an important step in the agency's process toward achieving unity of effort by articulating the strategies the agency employs to achieve objectives and performance goals that are used to evaluate agency progress.

### **9-1-1**

Act 12 of 2015, established a new funding program for Public Safety Answering Points across the Commonwealth. The funding program included a uniform 9-1-1 surcharge fee of \$1.65, a uniform 9-1-1 Fund for collecting surcharges, and updated procedures related to collecting and distributing surcharge revenues.

Over the years since the act's adoption, PEMA implemented many needed reforms to the 9-1-1 program to streamline business processes, improve transparency, simplify rules on how counties spend their 9-1-1 funds and improve the collection and distribution of 9-1-1 revenues. There has been significant progress made over the past years that set a solid foundation to move the Commonwealth towards next generation 9-1-1 (NG 9-1-1) and established PEMA as a leader in NG 9-1-1 in our region.

In 2019, the legislature passed Act 17 of 2019 to extend the provisions in the 9-1-1 act to January 31, 2024. Act 17 continues the collection of fees with expanded use and provides a framework for governance. Additionally, the act expands the members of the 9-1-1 board and specifies the important connection to Geospatial Information System (GIS) data layering as we migrate from legacy 9-1-1 systems to new technologies.

This extension will allow us to continue to build off the work we've done with the NG 9-1-1 implementation plan in consultation with the 9-1-1 Advisory Board. One of the key initiatives includes the acquisition of statewide aerial imaging in support of the NG 9-1-1 program. GIS is a critical component of the NG 9-1-1 system to assure that local GIS data is accurate to locate 9-1-1 callers and route their call to the correct Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) or 9-1-1 Center. Acquisition of this type of imagery is expensive and many of the counties are still using imagery data from 2008. PEMA is in its third year of a multiyear statewide aerial imagery contract to obtain statewide data to address the need. This data will be shared with the counties resulting in an approximate \$5 million overall savings to the counties. The contract also allows for state agencies or counties to buy-up additional higher resolution imagery and LIDAR data, if needed, at a reduced rate. This 9-1-1 funded initiative will provide cost savings for all levels of government.

## **Commonwealth Preparedness**

PEMA is the lead emergency coordination agency in the Commonwealth tasked with ensuring the safety of the Commonwealth's 12.7 million residents. The agency plans, organizes, equips, trains, exercises, and sustains the Commonwealth's capabilities and capacities to protect our state from notice and no notice events.

Pursuant to Title 35, the agency is statutorily tasked with preparing, maintaining, and updating current conditions to the Commonwealth Emergency Operations Plan (CEOP). The agency maintains the plan and coordinates activities as necessary to ensure the Commonwealth's ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters of any kind. Associated activities include providing training and exercise opportunities to Commonwealth agencies tasked with emergency support functions under the plan. In addition, the agency is responsible for a Commonwealth-wide training and exercise program for emergency management personnel at the state, county, and local levels. Continued assessment, development, and implementation of a robust training and education program includes position-specific training for the PEMA staff to enhance their capabilities in the Commonwealth Response Coordination Center (CRCC) during disasters.

The agency is also working collaboratively to develop a more agile workforce that is well-equipped, educated and trained. As part of these efforts, PEMA has initiated a multi-faceted transformation effort to ensure that the agency's workforce is credentialed and qualified. A part of this effort includes creating a statewide credentialing program mirrored after the FEMA Qualification System.



## Closing the Gaps

Despite the number of local, state, and federal programs available to assist disaster survivors and the great work of the many organizations that make up our Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (VOAD's), there continues to be many gaps that exist which inhibit a survivor's ability to effectively recover from natural and human-caused disasters in a timely manner. Looking for ways to close these gaps is critical to assuring community resiliency and is just the right thing to do for the citizens of the Commonwealth. By looking at innovative ways to close these gaps, such as Governor Wolf's Restore PA program, we will be able to close the current gaps that exist in supporting disaster survivors and invest in much needed hazard mitigation activities and projects that will prevent or limit the devastating human and public infrastructure impacts of future disasters and other emergencies.

In closing, On behalf of Governor Wolf, I thank you Chairman Saylor, Chairman Bradford, and members of the Committee, for your support of PEMA and our partners in public safety across the state. This budget will allow PEMA to provide the utmost level of support to the counties, stakeholder organizations and citizens of the Commonwealth. I appreciate the opportunity to appear here today and I will try to answer any questions you might have.

