



pennsylvania
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

**Statement for the
Senate Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee**

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Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency

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Chairman Vulakovich, Chairman Costa and members of the Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, I welcome this opportunity to appear before you to discuss ways to enhance our statewide emergency preparedness program. Essential to this effort is legislation that recognizes the key roles played by each level of government within the Commonwealth.

I'm Rick Flinn, Director of the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA). As an EMT, a community fire fighter and chief, and as a municipal, state and federal emergency manager, I have seen first-hand just how important clear, concise and comprehensive legislation is to our public safety and community preparedness programs. Over the coming months, I look forward to working with you and your staffs as, collectively, we strive to improve our statewide public safety programs.

By state government standards, PEMA is a small organization but our mission reaches across the state, involving all 67 counties and impacting every citizen. PEMA's legislative charge is comprehensive and includes planning, training and coordinating state government's response to address events which threaten lives and property, while supporting county and local governments in the areas of disaster preparedness, planning, and response to and recovery from man-made or natural disasters. Through effective intra and inter-governmental cooperation and coordination, our mission is to harness the resources of the Commonwealth in order to identify potential hazards, take appropriate steps to prevent their occurrence if possible, reduce their impact through effective plans and preparedness and assist when community recovery is necessary.

Title 35 contains the Emergency Management Services Code which governs how PEMA functions and provides the framework for how the Commonwealth and our local governments prepare for and respond to disasters. The program began, as a formal governmental function, in 1951 and the current version of Title 35 has been in place for many years. In fact the last major change was 19 years ago in 1996 in response to the January severe winter storm and flood disaster.

Since then, there have been numerous changes in our national and state public safety structure which necessitates changes to Title 35. Some of the significant events and federal law changes include: the 2007 Valentine's Day Winter Storm, Hurricane Katrina, the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the creation of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) cyber-attacks that now are happening on a frequent basis, and new federal guidelines and programs relating to all-hazard disasters. Some of those Federal initiatives include the National Preparedness Goal, the National Incident Management System, the National Infrastructure Protection Program, the National Pandemic Preparedness Program, and the National Response Framework. All of the aforementioned incidents and programs require the examination of existing legislation.

In 2011, Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee caused the most significant and widespread flooding in the Commonwealth since Hurricane Agnes in 1972. Across the board the response to those storms was remarkable and highly successful. But as always, we learned lessons that will further enhance our emergency response capabilities in the future. Simply put, the requirements of emergency management professionals continue to evolve and change. It is no longer enough

to be able to respond – we must work toward a comprehensive emergency management program focused on preparedness and the ability to prevent, protect against, respond to and recover from any disaster or emergency situation. Frankly, the changes needed to Title 35 are long overdue.

As you know, the process to update and revise this important legislation did not begin in 2015. It has been on-going for several years with numerous meetings and hearings conducted and several re-write drafts developed. All produced valuable recommendations and provided insight into the complex workings of our public safety and community preparedness programs. As we move forward I encourage our respective staffs and partners to incorporate these lessons learned into our vision for Pennsylvania’s public safety program in the future.

When Governor Wolf asked me to come back to the Commonwealth to help lead our community preparedness program, he was clear in his charge to include and involve all of our partners in this process. One of the first things we did as an Administration was to conduct a comprehensive table top exercise that involved the Cabinet and the Governor. Earlier this summer we began discussions on Title 35 with our county emergency managers and county 9-1-1 supervisors. This hearing continues that process. We plan to have additional meetings with our county stakeholders and the various local government associations.

As we begin this process, I think it is important to define our mutual expectations. Title 35 is a lengthy and comprehensive document which creates or authorizes a range of programs and activities at each level of government and in the private sector. I would hope that over the next few months we are able to develop working groups to explore options to develop best practices.

I know our respective agency and legislative staffs will continue to work as a unit and we welcome all comments from the various communities we serve. From our perspective, there is nothing in current law that is not subject to discussion and change. PEMA is open to change that makes this legislation better. And by encouraging and incorporating participation by all partners and stakeholders, I do believe this legislation will have broad and strong support.

The overarching goal of the amendments to Title 35 is to provide a more efficient and effective way for the Commonwealth and local governments to prepare for and respond to all-hazard disasters.

The natural disasters of Hurricane Irene, Tropical Storm Lee and Hurricane Sandy are a constant reminder of what our business is all about. Most days our agency is out of the public view. During those days we are behind the scenes doing the planning and preparing that is crucial to successfully respond to an incident. But when a disaster or emergency hits – sometime with advance warning or sometimes with no warning – we must come through for our citizens.

I believe the up-coming Papal visit is a case study in the complex, behind-the-scenes interaction between all levels of government and the private sector as we prepare our communities for the possible and the unknown.

With your support, Mr. Chairman, we will be successful in enhancing our emergency management capabilities across the state, county and local levels. The end result of enacting this

legislation: the citizens of our Commonwealth will be better protected in the event of a future disaster or emergency.

Mr. Chairman and the members of the committee, I thank you for the opportunity to outline our vision for the Title 35 amendment process. On behalf of our county and community emergency managers and first responders across the state, thank you for your dedication to and continued support of Pennsylvania's public safety program and your leadership on this important matter.

I would be happy to address any questions you or the members may have.