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Wolf Administration Discusses Need for Flexible Disaster Emergency Declarations to Support Communities in Emergencies

Pittsburgh, PA – The Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) and Allegheny County officials today discussed how flexible disaster emergency declarations allow emergency officials to meet the needs of communities before, during and after an emergency.

“Changes to the current disaster declaration process could have the unintended consequence of leaving emergency management professionals facing a number of unknowns that ultimately can impact the continuity of response and recovery operations,” PEMA Director Randy Padfield said. “While this scenario can seem implausible to many people, the past year has shown us that we need to expect the unexpected and emergency managers need to have available to them the tools and authorities they need when they need them.”

Padfield was joined at today’s press conference by Allegheny County Executive Rich Fitzgerald and Allegheny County Chief of Emergency Services Matt Brown.

“We are hopeful that COVID-19 was a once-in-a-century pandemic, but should our state be faced with such challenges again, strong and decisive action needs to be taken to protect the welfare of all who call this commonwealth home,” said Fitzgerald. “The proposed measures would, instead, make the safety of our community a political issue, with action determined by the party in leadership and efforts hampered by the need to get 253 members to come to some resolution on extension of emergency powers.”

Padfield said that by prematurely terminating a disaster declaration, the commonwealth signals to the federal government that the emergency or disaster, no matter what the cause, is under state control, meaning the federal government could end the disaster period.

This could impact future federal funding for any ongoing response or recovery operations, which can total in the millions of dollars, and the state would ultimately bear those costs. This also comes at a time when FEMA is urging states to take a more active role in leading disaster response and recovery operations as their ability to continue to provide resources outside of financial support is limited due to the ever increasing scale and magnitude of disasters facing the nation.

So far for the [COVID-19 disaster incident](#), the federal government has obligated approximately \$292 million to eligible Pennsylvania applicants to reimburse costs for eligible expenses under the Public Assistance program.

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