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## **Wolf Administration, Local Leaders Discuss Need for Flexible Disaster Emergency Declarations to Support Communities in Emergencies**

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

“Despite the COVID-19 pandemic being the first example of a disaster declaration being used in regard to an infectious disease outbreak, many have come to view emergency response through that lens,” PEMA Director Randy Padfield said. “Drastically changing a process that has worked exceptionally well for all other disasters that we’ve experienced in the past, such as flooding that occurs quite frequently, is extremely short-sighted. The citizens of Pennsylvania deserve something better than a knee-jerk reaction that will only serve to adversely impact the state’s ability to respond to emergency situations in a timely and efficient manner.”

Padfield was joined at today’s press conference by state Senators John Kane and Amanda Cappelletti, and other local leaders.

“Emergencies don’t follow timelines,” Senator Kane said. “They don’t end after three weeks. Emergency declarations provide access to critical resources and support for our state and local government. The proposed amendments to change our emergency response process risk putting Pennsylvanians into dangerous situations, as emergencies go unaddressed. These amendments would strip the governor and executive agencies of the power and resources necessary to help us rebuild and recover after a disaster.”

“It is imperative that governments are able to move swiftly and deftly during emergencies and disasters,” Senator Cappelletti added. “Taking constitutional power from the governor to do so and giving it to the General Assembly will result in delayed response times, harming Pennsylvanians, and political games. I voted no on the bill to protect the citizens of this great commonwealth from these harms and will vote no on the ballot. Every voter needs to make an informed choice, which is why we are here today bringing attention to two of the questions on the May 18th primary ballot.”

Since 1996, governors have issued more than 60 disaster declarations in Pennsylvania. About two dozen of those declarations had to be amended to include additional counties or to extend the declaration past the initial 90 days to ensure continuity of response and recovery operations.

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. At the same time, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (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 \$293 million to eligible Pennsylvania applicants to reimburse costs for eligible expenses under the Public Assistance program.

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