



FY2015-16 Budget Hearing Recap Wednesday, March 25, 2015

Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency/State Fire Commissioner

Testifying: Director Richard Flinn Jr., PEMA; Timothy Solobay, State Fire Commissioner

For FY 2015-16, the Governor is proposing to reduce General Fund support to PEMA by \$1.97 million or -13.5%. The reductions in PEMA are the result of eliminating the Local Municipal Emergency Relief line item and the Search & Rescue Programs line item.

The Governor is proposing to increase the State Fire Commissioner's appropriation by \$74,000 to cover increased employee costs.

Pennsylvania's number one threat is flooding; however the Commonwealth must also be concerned about major snow and ice storms and high wind events. In addition, the Commonwealth has five nuclear plants and one experimental nuclear reactor, 7,000 Hazardous Chemical Sites with over 3,200 of those having Extremely Hazardous Chemicals which require off-site plans, 10,000 plus Marcellus Well sites, 1,068 high risk dams and a transportation network that carries all kinds of dangerous products over the highways, air, water and through pipe lines. This includes on average 60 trains that travel across the state each week through 30 counties that are carrying Bakken Crude Oil (a volatile form of crude oil).

PEMA will also have to deal with special events like; this year's Papal Visit to Philadelphia, which may have six million people present over the time he is there; the LPGA Open that is being held in Lancaster this summer; and next year's Democratic National Convention, again being held in Philadelphia.

PEMA's primary mission is to support the counties.

This year, the top legislative priority for PEMA is the re-write of the 9-1-1 law which sunsets on June 30, 2015.

The Director stated there are two things that are absolutely essential to re-writing the 9-1-1 law:

1. First, all the stakeholders agree that statewide interconnectivity is essential to integrate Next Generation technology across the commonwealth. The final bill must apportion part of the 9-1-1 fund for statewide interconnectivity. If the state does not do statewide

interconnectivity, it is almost certain that the sixty-nine Public Safety Answering Points 9-1-1 Centers will have different Next Generation solutions and capabilities across the commonwealth. The end result is that different levels of public safety will exist across the commonwealth. Moreover, statewide interconnectivity done at the state level will reduce county network costs in the short-term and long-term.

2. Second, PEMA's current authority to oversee 9-1-1 must not be diluted. If PEMA's current authority is diluted, it will make it very difficult to manage the 9-1-1 program, provide the appropriate oversight regarding fund uses, and control expenditures.

The Fire Commissioner stated that the Fire Company and Ambulance Service Grant Program is one of the most important programs for the fire service. It will be up for re-authorization in 2016 so they will be starting work on it this year. The last time the General Assembly re-authorized the program it provided an additional \$5 million in funds to the grant awards, added career fire departments to the grant program, and provided additional funding to restore training programs.

One priority for the State Fire Commissioner is recruitment and retention regarding our volunteer fire service.

The Fire Commissioner also stated that the Office of State Fire Commissioner is looking to see if it can find a better way to promote regionalization or consolidation of fire companies that are wishing to do so. This is of growing concern given the decrease in volunteers in the fire service.

Office of Open Records

Testifying: Acting Executive Director Nathan Byerly; George Spiess, Chief of Outreach & Training

For FY 2015-16, the Governor is proposing to increase General Fund support for the Office of Open Records (OOR) by \$139,000 or 6.9%.

The Acting Executive Director stated that without an additional increase, the proposed budget leaves the OOR with no operating budget. The Office would be forced to eliminate a staff position to fund its day-to-day operations. The Office needs an additional \$360,000 to continue its mission.

In 2014, the OOR decided 2,017 appeals. Additionally, as required by the Right-To-Know-Law, the OOR responded to nearly 800 right-to-know requests seeking records from the OOR. In accordance with its statutory mandate, the OOR continued to respond to thousands of citizen and agency inquiries, litigate or monitor nearly 300 court appeals, and conduct dozens of

trainings across the Commonwealth. The office has a staff ranging from 7-9 appeals officers to complete these requests.

One of the major concerns with the Right-To-Know-Requests is the requests by corporations to local governments and requests by inmates. The Acting Executive Director acknowledged that it was an increasing problem for the Office and that they are willing to work with the Legislature to address the problem.

Department of Human Services

Testifying: Acting Secretary Ted Dallas; David Spishock, Director Office of the Budget

For FY 2015-16, the Governor is proposing to increase General Fund support for the Department of Human Services (DHS) by \$691 million or 6.3%.

DHS also receives money from the Lottery fund, which is proposed to decrease by \$81.9 million, and the Tobacco Settlement Fund, which is proposed to decrease by \$94.3 million.

Members expressed concern with the elimination of important line items such as burn centers and critical-access hospitals. The Acting Secretary stated that the budget needed to be looked at in its entirety and that DHS would like to have a conversation how those line items could be restored.

The Governor has elected to scrap Healthy PA and to move forward with Medicaid Expansion for Pennsylvania. Under Medicaid Expansion participants would be under a single Adult Benefit plan in the HealthChoices program. Under Healthy PA there were three plans a person could be placed under depending on medical need. The Acting Secretary did not outline the level of benefits a participant would receive under the single Adult Benefit plan.

The Acting Secretary was questioned about the backlog in Child Abuse Clearances. DHS had a 26 day wait on abuse clearance forms when the Acting Secretary took over. DHS has gotten that down to 18 days and they are working on getting it down to the statutorily required 14 days. DHS is planning to reduce the back log by:

1. Hiring more ChildLine Staff.
2. Upgrading IT systems to make it more user-friendly and enhance caseworker efficiency.
3. Reviewing current practices and policies to make sure that staff are working in the most efficient and effective manner possible.
4. Encouraging applicants to do online reporting. Online clearances can be obtained at www.keepkidssafe.pa.gov.

The Acting Secretary was also asked what the Department is doing to help prevent child abuse with the current funding available. A lot of the funding for child abuse prevention is federal

and there are often strings attached on how that money is spent. DHS got a waiver last year from the federal government to give them more flexibility. The Acting Secretary wants to evaluate and prioritize the levels of child abuse issues so that the Department has the flexibility to respond in the most effective manner possible with current funds.

Members raised concerns about the potential impact a raise in the minimum wage would have on Personal Care Homes which are already struggling financially. The Acting Secretary believes that clients of these facilities should be moved to long-term managed care because he does not believe they are receiving the appropriate level of services.

The Governor's budget proposal would also expand the sales tax to items such as nursing homes, community care for the elderly and disabled, home healthcare, haircuts, personal hygiene products, caskets, burial vaults, cable television, non-prescription drugs, and other items and services. Members expressed concern that these newly taxed items along with the increase of the rate from 6.0% to 6.6% would be more burdensome for lower-economic people.

The Acting Secretary referred several times to Governor Wolf's budget proposal beginning to restore cuts to DHS. Members pressed the Secretary on this noting that state dollars for DHS have always increased and that the "cuts" were the loss of federal stimulus dollars.

Governor Wolf's budget proposal keeps the Human Services Block Grant to the current 30 counties participating. The Acting Secretary wants more reporting from counties on how they are spending this money.