

PA EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY & OFFICE OF THE STATE FIRE COMMISSIONER BUDGET HEARING WRAP

Thursday, February 26, 2026



General Overview:

Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) Director David Padfield and Commissioner Thomas Cook, Office of the State Fire Commissioner (OSFC), testified before the House Appropriations Committee today. House Republicans focused their questions on the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters, funding for 911 centers, updates to Title 35 (Pennsylvania's Health and Safety Code), the governor's proposed cut to search-and-rescue funds, the delay in deploying funds allocated in prior years, and funding for EMS providers.

Key Takeaways:

- For PEMA, the governor is proposing a total General Fund spending amount of \$41.0 million for Fiscal Year 2026-27. This represents an overall increase of \$9.1 million, or 28.6%, over the current fiscal year.
 - Included in those totals is a proposed \$4.8 million budget for the State Fire Commissioner, an increase of \$36,000, or 0.8%, over the current fiscal year.
- House Republicans expressed concerns to the Fire Commissioner that volunteer fire departments are struggling with recruitment and retention and shared a desire for more coordination and support from the state to reduce burdens on volunteers and enhance recruitment.
 - Members also shared several experiences of fire companies merging and noted that consolidations should not result in reduced state funding for fire services in a given community.
- Once again, the governor has chosen to eliminate the Urban Search and Rescue line-item in his budget proposal. House Republicans expressed frustration with this proposed cut and noted the funding supports essential services in Western Pennsylvania during emergencies.
 - The committee also asked why prior year funds for this line item have not been dispersed.
- 911 services are administered in Pennsylvania by county government, with funding available from the Commonwealth through a 911 fee on phone lines. House Republicans' questions identified that further discussion will be needed on fee structures as more devices gain the ability to contact 911.
- Committee members stressed the need to update the Health and Safety Code, noting that it was last updated in 1996. There are several issues related to EMS funding and sustainability that should be addressed to ensure the continued viability of emergency medical services across the Commonwealth.

Notable Q&A:



Rep. Eric Nelson asks PEMA why the governor is cutting the Urban Search and Rescue line item.



Rep. Charity Krupa asked PEMA for their views on the importance of updating Title 35, Pennsylvania's Health and Safety Code.



Rep. Thomas Kutz discusses the current and future status of funds from the 911 fee.