

PA Senate and House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committees
Joint Hearing
Gino Merli Veterans' Center
401 Penn Avenue
Scranton, PA
August 24, 2016

RE: Perspective of South Central Task Force (SCTF) Concerning Proposed Title 35 Revisions

Good Morning, Committee Members:

I am Stephen Libhart, Director of Dauphin County's Department of Public Safety and the appointed Emergency Management Coordinator (EMC) of Dauphin County. As the EMC of one of the SCTF member counties, I also serve on the Executive Board of SCTF. For more than three years, I have enjoyed the privilege of serving as the Chairperson for the SCTF.

The South Central Task Force members are the counties of Adams, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Lancaster, Lebanon, Perry and York. We meet in person monthly to discuss short term and long term objectives for SCTF, and to discuss and approve expenditures in support of Task Force activities; revenues for the Task Force are allocated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Homeland Security Grant Program (HSGP), which is administered by the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA). Dauphin County has been the Fiduciary Agent for SCTF since the enactment of the HSGP more than ten years ago.

SCTF primarily exists to support local and county emergency preparedness agencies for problems that may exceed their respective capabilities. Our activities are supported by a robust roster of individuals and sponsoring agencies who contribute to the needs of our communities on a 24 x 7 basis. Since our inception in 1997, SCTF has provided significant assistance to our region's first responders in advocating regional planning and preparedness, acquiring specialized supplies and equipment, hosting training and exercises, and facilitating collaborative solutions for regional problems. SCTF has been an invaluable asset to our region in assisting our counties and underlying municipalities to best prepare for, respond to, and recover from any hazard we have or may experience.

All nine Regional Task Forces are faced with the dilemma of decreasing HSGP funds and the continuation of support to our first responders and communities. In the last three years, the SCTF grant allocation has remained level, although it is now roughly only one-third of our annual average grant award from 2003 through 2009. Current emphasis has been focused on the sustainment of the operational capabilities and resources that have been acquired since the establishment of the HSGP in 2003, while striving to address new and emerging threats and risks as they develop. We believe that we have been effective and efficient stewards of the taxpayers monies, and our efforts have substantially enhanced our ability to deal with larger and more complex response scenarios that can exceed local capabilities.

Despite our capabilities, there exist challenges and opportunities. We believe that there is a need for increased coordination between the state and regional/County responders. For example, our plans are created at the local / county levels, but oftentimes we receive little feedback as to what will actually be done at the state level. In those areas where good coordination exists, it is based more on who the parties are and their personal relationship, rather than a continuous and sustained policy process. There is clearly a need to establish more trusted partnerships. One suggestion for better strategic-level coordination

would be for the Chairs of the Task Forces to be members of the Commonwealth's Emergency Management Council.

Stove-pipe planning and duplication of effort have been a challenge in sharing information among the Regional Task Forces and the State (PEMA & other state agency partners). While there have been improvements, there are still challenges in ascertaining the resource capabilities of each of the Regional Task Forces. A listing of all Task Force's equipment and capabilities should be distributed annually to each Regional Task Force, since each is somewhat unique in their capabilities. A documented plan of what realistic capabilities each Task Force and the state will have in a given region is a much needed tool, so that we can focus our efforts on obtainable and sustainable programs.

One positive example of RTF's sharing capabilities and training is the utilization of the All Hazards Incident Management Team (IMT). While SCTF has the necessary staffing needed to sustain our own IMT, not every region can do so. As a result, several RTF's have joined together to form AHIMT's with staffing from multiple Task Forces. This has facilitated inter-regional training and response, where an increasing number IMT responses to support both planned special events and incidents are now being staffed with personnel from multiple Task Forces. In addition, many members of the regional IMT's are also members of the PA Type-3 IMT, thereby increasing our capabilities at the state level.

We believe that there are opportunities for some of the Regional Task Forces to consider either consolidation or at least centralizing their administrative support in an effort to increase coordination among the Task Forces and decrease overall costs associated with the program management. PEMA has shown great promise and effort in revising their operation of their Grants Management Division, which has led to greatly increased communication and efficiencies in using the grant funds. However, there are opportunities by which we could collectively improve our coordinated Task Force planning and operations.

Lastly, there remain challenges in providing worker protections for a number of our regional partners and stakeholders who actively engage in regional activities and staff our regional response resources (e.g., IMT). HSGP funds cannot be used to provide insurance or legal protections for our members. As a result, Task Force members must either be covered by their employer's / sponsoring agency's insurance and workman's compensation programs, or risk having no protections when participating in any Task Force activity. The crafting of a statutory solution to allow the Commonwealth to provide this coverage to participants during Task Force activities would provide the requisite protections for our personnel and likely enhance all of our Task Forces' memberships.

I thank you for your time today, and providing me the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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