



BUTLER COUNTY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

315 HIGH STREET, SUITE 670, HAMILTON, OHIO 45011
PHONE: 513.785.5810 – FAX: 513.785.5811
EMAIL: BCEMA@BUTLERCOUNTYOHIO.ORG



Substitute HB 166 – Testimony

House Finance Committee

Matthew R. Haverkos, Butler County EMA Director

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Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chairman Scherer, Ranking Member Cera and members of the House Finance Committee, my name is Matthew Haverkos and I am the current EMA Director of Butler County.

I am here to speak on why we feel it is important to include specific language in House Bill 166 Operational Budget creating an effective end date on Section 755 of HB 62 Transportation Budget recently passed. Specifically, terms on an end date for the provision added pertaining to the creation of a Countywide Emergency Management Program under a fire chief having “countywide authority” or the Sheriff. To be clear, a fire chief with “countywide authority” does not exist in Ohio. At this time, the Amendment referenced does not include any financial analysis or scope to the additional impacts to ORC 5502.26. Time was not provided to address potential impacts to the existing law which structures EMA in Butler County, and it remains out position that in order to address these impacts fully and transparently, standalone action is required.

It is important to provide an end date to this legislation which was not created for any of the other 87 counties in Ohio, except Butler County. If this is truly a “pilot legislation” there should be an end date. According to the revised legislative amendment, Section 755.15, this pertains to a county with a population between 350,000 and 375,000 based on the 2010 federal decennial census which is structured under 5502.26. There is only one county in Ohio that this matches. That is Butler County.

Additionally, this targeted amendment provides unprecedented authority to a single elected official over all levels of government within the county. As a true believer in “Home Rule” this EMA Amendment is afforded the opportunity to be reviewed fully by the townships and municipalities it applies and without a subsequent end date, there may be no opportunity to review its validity. Currently, organizations such as the County Commissions Association of Ohio, the Ohio Township Association, Ohio Municipal League and the Ohio Fire Chiefs Association among all others asked are opposed to this legislative authority.

As written, this subsection to the Transportation Budget Bill requires the county commissioners to financially support this structure. In Butler County, this was not locally addressed or supported and raises questions to the financial collaborative in existence under the EMA Executive Board. Our EMA operations are locally funded with the support of program grants which built the existing system and all of its parts within. I feel that there is an opportunity with this legislation to address the financial liabilities between the county and the jurisdictions within. It is important to include an opportunity to review any “pilot program” such as this with vast impacts on the rest of the State.

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Additionally, HB 62, subsection 755, provides for unprecedented opportunity to control the funding of EMA Per capita, countywide public communication system, radios, and in Butler County specific, fees currently set by the EMA Executive Board under 5502.261 to be paid by every jurisdiction for the annual maintenance of radios. Any of these fees would then be subject to change at any point under this “pilot” structure and can have a substantial impact on the local jurisdictions and agencies working under the current collaborative.

As the Director of Butler County, a county-wide collaborative, I am asking that the House Finance Committee review the proposed amendment to include an end date for the EMA Amendment to legislation HB 62 for the aforementioned reasons. According to the Legislative Budget Office, Office of Research and Drafting, the financial effect of this legislation is “Uncertain.”

In summation, a county emergency management agency should remain a neutral entity which can impartially operate during disasters to coordinate resources and funding to those most in need. Emergency Management is made up of and truly touches the “whole community” to promote preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation of disasters which affect Ohio. Without an end time of this pilot legislation, there could be significant financial impacts at the local level such as grant ineligibility, which would result in a funding gap in order to provide sufficient service to our residents.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my support for this financial amendment to HB 166. I ask that you include the language creating an effective end date for the pilot program identified in Section 755 of HB 62 Transportation Budget. If you have any questions, I’m happy to answer those at this time.

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