



EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION OF OHIO

Good evening Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Scherer, Ranking Member Cera and members of the House Finance Committee. My name is Matt Haverkos and I am the Emergency Management Director in Butler County, as well as a member of the Emergency Management Association of Ohio.

I stand before you today in opposition to language that is currently in the Transportation Budget that would allow counties to realign their emergency management program under the County Sheriff.

Among a myriad of other issues that have been brought up to the committee, I wanted to focus today on the resource and planning coordination concerns that this language poses.

Per Ohio Revised Code (ORC) sections 5502.26 and 5502.271:

Includes, without limitation, development of an all-hazards emergency operations plan that has been coordinated with all agencies, boards, and divisions having emergency management functions...

Thus, emergency management agencies are charged with coordinating the planning process amongst all emergency management partners within their jurisdiction to ensure a comprehensive “all-hazards” plan is in place. This planning process is facilitated by emergency management agencies remaining as **neutral entities** as established under the code sections above, so that an unbiased response is possible without being compromised by the EMA reporting directly to a single elected official.

The county emergency management director is the designated position for requesting resources through the Ohio Emergency Management Agency when local resources are exhausted. Such resources include pharmaceuticals, personal protective equipment, generators, communications resources, etc. In emergency situations and disasters, an emergency management director may need to make difficult resource allocations decisions. Making such decisions in an impartial manner may well be hindered if the emergency management director reported to one of the officials (sheriff or county-wide fire chief) requesting those resources.

Emergency management at the local level is often engaged in a multitude of functions that would not be conducive to another emergency responder in lieu of a dedicated, independent emergency manager. Examples include:

- Hazardous materials (operations, planning, exercising, response, cost recovery, training, etc.)
- Mitigation (planning and projects, such as flood and wind mitigation projects)
- Severe weather planning and preparedness (warnings and notifications systems, public education, coordination with National Weather Service)
- Long-term recovery planning and identification of shelter areas

For instance, in 2012, we had EF-3 tornado that struck our region in Southwest Ohio. This triggered a nine-day response by first responders, which as stated before is different than the response of our local emergency management personnel. EMA in Southwest Ohio was in response and recovery mode to this disaster for three years in order to help the community to recover from the devastation.

Under the County Sheriff, EMA dedication to long-term recovery will suffer given that the mission of law enforcement lies primarily with the immediate response and not the long-term repair that a community must go through that the EMA helps facilitate.

In summation, a county emergency management agency should remain a neutral entity which can impartially coordinate resources and planning efforts. Emergency management touches all of the disciplines within public safety and many others, such as faith-based and private-nonprofits. These collaborative functions could be stifled if a county emergency management director reported to another public safety official, such as a sheriff or countywide fire chief. There could also be detrimental financial impacts at the local level such as grant ineligibility, which would result in the necessity of more local funding to provide a similar level of service.

For all of the aforementioned reasons and others, it is the official stance of the Emergency Management Association of Ohio (EMAO) that there should be no statutory option which would allow for a county emergency management director to report to a countywide fire chief or county sheriff in addition to the statutory requirements that no EMA director be a jurisdictional elected official.