**TESITMONY TO THE SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE**

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My name is Brett Boothe and I currently serve as the Gallia County Engineer and as the County Engineers’ Association of Ohio’s Government Affairs Co-Chair.

**State of Emergency in 21 Ohio Counties Declared**

On March 20, 2019, Governor Mike DeWine declared a state of emergency in 21 Ohio counties (the President made the federal declaration on April 9, 2019) that suffered serious highway damage following severe weather that started in February. All 21 counties declared have suffered damage to roads and/or bridges from the severe weather. Some roadways still have lane restrictions or are closed completely. Many of these roads are in dangerous condition, impacting the safety of Ohio's drivers. By declaring a state of emergency, Ohio can now access federal funding to help with the unplanned costs to repair the highways damaged by heavy rain and flooding.

Joint preliminary damage assessments conducted by local, state, and federal emergency management officials documented damages to critical infrastructure, such as county roads, bridges, culverts, and public buildings totaling $45 million for 21 counties per Laura Adock (OEMA). FEMA’s Public Assistance Program, which repays local governments for eligible storm-related response and recovery efforts, including debris removal, emergency protective measures, and the repair, replacement, or restoration of damaged infrastructure Under the Public Assistance (PA) Program, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) awards grants to assist State and local governments and eligible Private Nonprofit (PNP) entities with their recovery efforts.  The declaration currently provides funds for eligible debris removal, emergency protective measures, and permanent work.  The federal share of the funding is 75% of the eligible costs.

The first responders are generally local governments using their own personnel and funding. But if the event exceeds that community’s capacity, the State has stepped in with its resources. Late last year, the State stepped in with $25 million to help locals cover both shares of the 25% portion of the FEMA’s Public Assistance Program. This year, according to OEMA, the 25% match will need to start at $12 million, but is expected to be higher since the actual cost of the disaster is expected to increase.

In HB 62, Allocation of State Capital Improvement Program funding for emergency purposes was accepted to increase the authorization of the annual allocation of State Capital Improvement Program (SCIP) funding for emergency purposes, from 2% under current law to 6%. This provision will increase the amount OPWC sets aside for emergency purposes from $3.5 million per fiscal year to $10.5 million per fiscal year. However, the additional set-aside funding for emergencies doesn’t begin until FY 2022 leaving many of the local counties with an inability to cover their portion necessary to cover the local match that is accumulating year over year. To help ease the burden of some of the poorest counties in Ohio, we would ask the State to help cover some of the local match for those counties one more time before the OPWC policy change takes effect.

**Ohio counties included in Governor DeWine's emergency proclamation and the President’s declaration include**: Adams, Athens, Belmont, Brown, Gallia, Guernsey, Hocking, Jackson, Jefferson, Lawrence, Meigs, Monroe, Morgan, Muskingum, Noble, Perry, Pike, Ross, Scioto, Vinton and Washington

**FEMA’s Public Assistance Grant Program**

The PA program is extremely complex, requiring extensive coordination among federal, state, and local governments. FEMA evaluates state requests for presidential disaster declarations, which are required before the agency can provide PA funding, and makes recommendations to the president, who has ultimate discretion. States often conduct a preliminary damage assessment in collaboration with FEMA to determine whether a presidential declaration is warranted and whether a state qualifies for PA based on six factors:

1. Estimated cost of statewide damage to public infrastructure. FEMA generally uses a starting point of $1 million in damages or $1.46 per capita, whichever is greater.
2. Estimated cost of damage to public infrastructure in counties within the state. To be included in the declaration, a county must sustain per-capita damage of at least $3.68.
3. Insurance coverage held by state and local governments.
4. Extent to which mitigation activities reduced damages.
5. Whether the state has experienced multiple recent disasters.
6. Availability of other federal disaster assistance programs.

Federal PA funding carries a cost share of 25 percent of recipients’ eligible expenditures. FEMA can cover more than 75 percent of costs if a governor makes, and the president approves, a specific request or if Congress directs the agency to do so.

