

Countywide EMA Program Talking Points

March 22, 2019

Overview

- An amendment was placed into the Transportation Budget, HB 62, that would create a pilot program within Butler and Stark Counties that would place the EMA program under the county sheriff or county fire chief (there are currently no county fire chiefs in Ohio)
- This pilot program would last for 4 years
- The county commissioners would be responsible for funding the development, acquisition, operation, and maintenance of a countywide public safety communication system and any communication devices, radios, and other equipment necessary for the system's operation and use.

Main Takeaways

- Even if the language only names Butler and Stark counties, this would have an impact on all counties as emergency efforts of large scale often require the involvement of the entire region, and even the entire state
- The role of an EMA program goes far beyond simply the communications system, and includes duties that law enforcement does not have the training or experience to oversee. Examples include:
 - Hazardous materials coordination (operations, planning, exercising, response, cost recovery, training, etc.)
 - Resource allocation (pharmaceuticals, personal protective equipment, generators, 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)
- Federal grant funding stipulates that the EMA program must be a **neutral entity**. Any program that is under the control of a single elected official would likely disqualify the organization from receiving federal funding
 - The county commissioners would then have to compensate this expense from the LGF. Given the recent cuts, the LGF will not be able to support this financial constraint, which will likely result in cuts from other emergency response funding

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.