



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

FISCAL NOTE

HOUSE BILL NO. 843

PRINTER'S NO. 2748

PRIME SPONSOR: D. Miller

COST / (SAVINGS)

FUND	FY 2023/24	FY 2024/25
General Fund	See Fiscal Impact	See Fiscal Impact

SUMMARY:

Amends Title 35 (Health and Safety) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes by consolidating portions of the Counterterrorism Planning, Preparedness and Response Law; adds a requirement for a Type 3 urban search and rescue response team in Allegheny County; and directs the Joint State Government Condition to conduct a study of the Commonwealth's urban search and rescue system.

ANALYSIS:

House Bill 843, Printer's Number 2748 consolidates portions of Act 227 of 2002, known as the Counterterrorism Planning, Preparedness, and Response Act. The bill also requires the establishment of a Type 3 urban search and rescue (US&R) response team in Allegheny County no later than January 1, 2026, or eighteen months after the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) enters into a letter of agreement with a sponsoring agency. It also requires a Type 1 US&R response team covering Philadelphia County, though this requirement may be met by an existing federal team. The bill states that various emergency task forces organized in the commonwealth are eligible to receive grant and donation support in addition to local, state, and federal funding.

The bill specifies that an US&R response team may only be deployed in accordance with policies developed by PEMA and that during an activation or deployment resulting from a governor's declaration of a disaster emergency, the administrative and operations costs of the team, its members, and their employers will be paid under the governor's emergency declaration. Members of US&R response teams will be eligible to receive workers' compensation and death benefits during a period of activation. During an activation resulting from a governor's declaration of a disaster emergency, the benefits will also be paid under the emergency declaration.

The bill also directs the Joint State Government Commission (JSGC) to conduct a comprehensive study and assessment of the commonwealth's urban search and rescue capabilities. JSGC is tasked with studying, among other things, the overall emergency response system plan for the commonwealth; the status of protocols and capabilities of emergency medical services provided to urban search and rescue teams; the reconnaissance capabilities of Pennsylvania Task Force 1 and the Pennsylvania National Guard; the protocols and communications capabilities among PEMA, Task Force 1, and local emergency services; and capabilities of Task Force 1 regarding structural stabilization.

The act shall take effect in 60 days.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Given the January 1, 2026, deadline established in the bill and the work required to assess the needs of upgrading existing response teams in Allegheny County to meet the requirements of a Type 3 team, there are unlikely to be any fiscal impacts in the current fiscal year.

According to PEMA, the ongoing cost to maintain a Type 3 urban search and rescue response team in Allegheny County could amount to between \$3 million and \$4 million annually. In addition, there will be initial costs to upgrade the existing PA Strike Team 1 in the region to a Type 3 response team. Prior estimates have suggested those initial costs may be as much as \$19 million. However, PEMA notes that actual costs will be dependent on the additional equipment, resources, and training necessary for the public safety agencies that participate in the task force to meet the requirements of a Type 3 designation. Furthermore, existing federal and state grant programs that provide funding for public safety projects are available to offset costs for participating agencies. As such, the cost of establishing a Type 3 US&R team in western Pennsylvania is indeterminate at this time.

The study required by the Joint State Government Commission can be completed utilizing the existing budget and resources of the commission.

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House Appropriations Committee (D)

DATE: March 20, 2024

Estimates are calculated using the best information available. Actual costs and revenue impact incurred may vary from estimates.