



Senate Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee

Senator Lisa Baker, Chair

Diane McNaughton, Executive Director

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July 3, 2012

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MEMORANDUM

TO: All Senators

FROM:  Senator Lisa Baker

SUBJECT: Bill to Establish a State Small Disaster Assistance Program

Please join me in co-sponsoring a bill to set up a state disaster assistance program to help victims cope with uninsured losses caused by flash floods, fires, snowstorms, tornadoes, and other emergencies.

This legislation would help victims of disasters that fall below the federal threshold for aid, such as the flash floods that hit Plymouth Township and Plymouth Borough in Luzerne County one year ago today. Although judged to be "small" by federal standards, these disasters were devastating to municipal budgets and families. State assistance would be limited to grants to help repair damage to primary residences, personal property and public facilities.

Many other states have established state disaster assistance programs, including New York, Florida, Virginia, Texas, California, and Tennessee.

Our assistance program would be created under the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA), with grants to income-eligible individuals not to exceed \$10,000. Among other uses, the funds could be devoted to debris removal, which was a dire but unmet need after Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee. The maximum Public Disaster Assistance Grant, to help political subdivisions when damage to public facilities exceeds their finances, would be 50 percent of the eligible loss.

Grants would be available through a restricted account in the state Treasury, with \$16 million in revenues derived from the Johnstown Flood Tax, which was established in 1936 with the express purpose of aiding flood victims. Unexpended funds would lapse to the General Fund.

During a hearing hosted by the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee last September, PEMA, the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania, the PA State Association of Township Supervisors, and others testified to the need for such a program.

If you wish to co-sponsor this bill, please contact Liz Clancy by email at **LClancy@pasen.gov** or by phone at **787-7428**. Thank you.