



**pennsylvania**  
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

**Testimony for the House Education Committee**

**March 15, 2018**

Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency

Jeff Thomas, Executive Deputy Director

Good Morning Chairman Hickernell, Chairman Roebuck, and members of the House Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this conversation about keeping our schools safe in the Commonwealth. My name is Jeff Thomas, Executive Deputy Director for the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA). While we are a smaller agency, the mission we take on is important: to coordinate the state agency response and support county/local governments in the areas of disaster preparedness, and response to and recovery from disasters, human-caused or natural.

Under Title 35, the Commonwealth's Health and Safety Code, one of the roles PEMA has is to provide guidelines to schools on development and implementation of a comprehensive 'All Hazards' response and emergency preparedness plan. In order to fulfill this role, PEMA supports the emergency planning activities of 67 counties and more than 2,600 local governments, as well as other state agencies, and all school districts. PEMA has been working with the Department of Education, Pennsylvania State Police, and other state agencies to ensure that emergency plans are in place for our schools across the Commonwealth. Utilizing the Previstar CEM planning software, PEMA has created a planning template reflecting federal and state standards to help users create consistent and complete emergency plans. Through PEMA's enterprise license, this tool provides a centralized, web-based system for local agencies to develop, update, review and securely store and access emergency plans free of charge.

Schools that want to participate in and utilize the CEM Planner can contact either their local Intermediate Unit (IU), PA Department of Education, or PEMA. All IU's and school districts have

been entered into the system and have access, including cyber schools, charter schools and parochial schools.

PEMA recently completed a 2-year grant performance period from the U.S. Department of Education in December of 2017, working with PDE to improve and integrate school emergency operations plans. The grant provided \$1 million in funds to address safe schools planning initiatives in Pennsylvania.

Highlights of this grant initiative include:

- Partnership with Intermediate Units, Diocese, and Philadelphia School District to conduct training throughout the Commonwealth.
- Utilization of a virtual planning tool and development of planning templates to assist school districts integrate planning efforts with local municipalities and county emergency management officials.
- Approximately 65 separate classes were conducted by PEMA staff and/or contracted training professionals. Courses were held on location at the Intermediate Unit facilities. Courses Included:
  - Multi-hazard Emergency Planning
  - Reunification
  - Planning for the Needs of Children in Disasters
  - Incident Command System 100, 200, and 300, and 402
  - Basic Public Information Officer
- Development of 23 different plan templates, including safe cover, Lock-down, Drop-cover-hold, and Mass Casualty
- Development of a Parent/Student Reunification course
- Emergency Operations Planning (Virtual Planning) for the entire City of Philadelphia School District (School Administrators)

The work with the Philadelphia School District has resulted in all 208 brick and mortar school in Philadelphia actively using the CEM Planner to develop, update, and manage their emergency plans. There have also been many cyber and parochial schools throughout the Commonwealth that are using the planning tool.

PEMA will continue to work with school officials, our sister agencies and partners in public safety across the state to ensure that schools have 'All-Hazards' plans to keep our children and staff members safe. I appreciate the opportunity to appear here today and I will answer any questions you might have.