

House State Government Committee
Hearing on PPE Procurement, Storage and Distribution During the COVID-19 Pandemic
March 31, 2021

Opening Remarks of Secretary Curtis Topper, Department of General Services

Joined by: D. Randy Padfield, Director, Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency; Deputy Secretary Ken Hess, Department of General Services; Jeffrey Thomas, Executive Deputy Director, Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, and Andrew Pickett, Director of the Bureau of Emergency Preparedness and Response, Department of Health.

Good morning Chairman Grove, Chairwoman Davidson, and members of the House State Government Committee. I want to thank the committee for the opportunity to discuss the important topic of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). I also want to share my sincerest gratitude to the Department of Health (DOH) and the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) for their willingness to participate in the discussion today.

With me are D. Randy Padfield, PEMA Director; Jeffrey Thomas, PEMA Executive Deputy Director; Ken Hess, DGS Deputy Secretary for Procurement; Andrew Pickett, DOH Director of the Bureau of Emergency Preparedness and Response. Each of these individuals has played a crucial role in ensuring a swift response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. For the information of the members, I would like to highlight where we started in March of 2020 to demonstrate how far we have come.

Prior to the pandemic, the Commonwealth maintained a modest supply of PPE to be ready for future public health emergencies. Since 2014, the Pennsylvania Department of Health has been purchasing small quantities of PPE as part of the Commonwealth's preparedness activities for Ebola. However, it's important to note that this PPE was specific to Ebola, limited in quantity and not of the types of resources that were necessary for the current COVID-19 response.

As the COVID-19 situation evolved in early 2020, it was clear that the need for PPE significantly surpassed the supply and immediate action was required to remedy this. As the Commonwealth's Chief Procurement Agency, DGS quickly assumed the role of the Centralized Procurement Office for PPE. In consultation with DOH and PEMA, DGS set up an Emergency Response Warehouse to distribute medical supplies to state agencies, municipalities, local emergency management & responders, as well as health care facilities. As of 3/26/2021 the Commonwealth has distributed over 6.3 mil N-95 masks, 18.2 mil gloves, 1.2 mil gowns and 1.4 mil bottles of hand sanitizer. Over the past 14 months, our agencies have been in constant communication, working to improve upon existing processes to foster the best possible response to the COVID-19 pandemic. DGS continues to staff the Emergency Response Warehouse and provide vital support to our customer agencies. Our staff oversee the receipt, storage, and distribution of critical medical supplies. As we move forward, it is important to remember that we are not alone in this endeavor. Each agency has played a role in getting us to where we are today. As partners, we work closely with DOH to determine the types of products we should purchase. Their team provides us with the necessary insight to determine what products are most needed and how much of that product we should procure. Finally, we rely on PEMA's expertise in the field of emergency response coordination. Through their relationships with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and County

Emergency Management Offices, they are able to manage incoming requests for resources and obtain federal reimbursement of state funds used to purchase PPE.

The ongoing efforts of our agencies to maintain a sustainable stockpile at the state level will be essential in ensuring the health security of the Commonwealth, whether the next threat is another wave of COVID-19, or any other major public health threat.

Again, I appreciate the opportunity to highlight our efforts to create a safe environment for all Pennsylvanians. I am happy to take any questions you may have.