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PEMA: Gov. Wolf's Disaster Declaration Vital for Commonwealth Response

Harrisburg, PA – The director of the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, Randy Padfield, today emphasized the need for continuing Governor Tom Wolf's proclamation of disaster emergency in order to continue commonwealth response efforts and make state, county and local governments eligible for federal reimbursement of costs associated with the COVID-19 response.

"While we're encouraged by the low numbers of recent new cases, this pandemic remains a very real threat," Padfield said. "Without the emergency procurement provisions provided by the declaration, it would become even harder to quickly purchase supplies necessary to support containment, prevention and treatment of COVID-19. Critical PPE has already been difficult to find at times, and not being able to obtain it puts our front line first responders and medical personnel at an increased risk of contracting the virus."

Padfield said the commonwealth was awarded a federal disaster declaration to reimburse costs related to Public Assistance emergency protective measures, which include expenses such as emergency medical care, purchase and distribution of commodities like consumables and PPE, and communicating vital health and safety information to the public.

The lack of a state proclamation signals that funding and resources from the federal government are no longer needed to cope with the pandemic. The federal government could terminate the federal disaster declaration, which means any costs expended after the federal termination would not be eligible for reimbursement.

"The potential loss of federal reimbursement could be devastating to eligible applicants," Padfield said. "It's not only state agencies that would suffer, but also organizations that have already been hard hit by the pandemic, including county and local governments, school districts, and certain private-non-profits like volunteer fire companies, hospitals and nursing homes."

The proclamation gives PEMA the authority to assign resource requests to state agencies to provide assistance to county and local officials.

“Our partner agencies continue to assist with community-based testing sites, provide staff and supplies to food banks across the state, conduct site assessments at health care facilities, provide emergency short term staffing to long term care (LTC) facilities experiencing critical staff shortages until they are able to obtain more permanent staffing, provide instructions on proper PPE use, and conduct COVID-19 testing at LTC facilities,” said Padfield.

Padfield said that if the current state and federal proclamations are terminated and the state sees a significant resurgence of COVID-19 in the fall or winter, Governor Wolf would need to sign a new disaster proclamation in order to request federal assistance through a new federal disaster declaration. There would be no guarantee that the governor’s request would be granted.

For information and updates related to COVID-19, visit the Department of Health website at www.health.pa.gov or [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).