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**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF RUSSELL STRICKLAND, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
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**HOUSE BILL 650 – STATE GOVERNMENT - EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT -
GOVERNOR DECLARATIONS**

Senate Education Health and Environmental Affairs Committee

16 March 2020

House Bill 650 will put Maryland at the forefront of emergency management policy by adding an additional tool for emergency managers to coordinate resources before disasters impact communities. When Maryland communities are impacted or threatened by a threat or hazard, the Governor has the authority to declare a State of Emergency through executive order.

Once enacted the executive order grants the Governor the authority to take measures to protect the lives and property of Marylanders through a series of actions including:

- Control the movement of people and vehicles within disaster zones
- Establish curfews
- Suspend the effect of any statute, rule, or regulation
- Direct and compel evacuations
- Authorize the use of private property for disaster operations
- Implement other protective measures (e.g. establish housing) to assist disaster survivors

In addition to these powers expressly granted to the Governor during a declared State of Emergency, the executive order also authorizes the State to enter into interstate resource agreements through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC). EMAC allows MEMA to receive assistance from organizations outside of Maryland to fulfill a variety of needs during disasters. This resource management mechanism is only available when the Governor signs an executive order enacting a State of Emergency. Most notably, MEMA has leveraged this mechanism for: Ellicott City flooding events in 2016 and 2018, January 2016 Blizzard event (Winter Storm Jonas) and the 2015 Baltimore City Civil Unrest. In addition to these incidents MEMA has prepared to request assistance during Hurricane Joaquin in 2015, Hurricane Matthew in 2016, Hurricane Florence in 2018, and Hurricane Dorian in 2019. While these hurricanes did not significantly impact Maryland MEMA conducted extensive preparatory actions to ensure agencies were prepared 72 hours prior to their anticipated landfall.

Forecast accuracy for hurricanes in the Northeast is challenging. Often times hurricanes change

course as they move northerly, changing preparatory actions. Maryland finds itself in a difficult situation, needing to preposition resources well in advance of landfall, yet not needlessly alarm the public before forecast certainty exists with declaration of “State of Emergency.”

Aside from consequence management activities Maryland is host to numerous major special events annually. These events, such as the Star-Spangled Spectacular, Preakness Stakes, NFL, NCAA, and MLB games, major concerts, and political events draw visitors from across the world. These events task local public safety resources, requiring aid from other jurisdictions and sometimes out of state. While this is the case, declaring a state of emergency for a special event in order to bring resources in from out of state would deter visitors from attending and paint Maryland in a negative light.

While the declaration of a state of emergency is an important emergency management tool, it communicates a message of consequence to the public, one that should only be used when absolutely necessary. In the past there have been several instances that Maryland declared a State of Emergency based on current forecasts, only to have the threat decrease later. From a crisis communications standpoint this erodes our trust with the public and also weakens our messaging in the event of an actual disaster. It is for this reason that State emergency managers need a tool that can enable pre-impact preparations without communicating misleading messages to the public.

House Bill 650 proposes to establish a first in the nation, “enhanced coordination order,” which carries with it some of the provisions of a full state of emergency, enabling the emergency management system to operate before a time at which a full state of emergency is needed. Once decision-makers are certain that a threat or hazard will impact Maryland, the Governor can then sign a State of Emergency executive order when necessary, which will accurately convey the severity of the situation to the public and carry with it the full weight and actions of a State of Emergency.

The enhanced coordination order could: allow for activation of the Maryland National Guard; activate the Emergency Management Assistance Compact; coordinate the movement of supplies and people in an effort to preposition resources; and allow state emergency management to take measures to support local emergency management agencies when requested. The enhanced coordination order remains in effect for seven days or until execution of a full State of Emergency.

House Bill 650 is an important step in modernizing emergency management policy in Maryland. By allowing emergency managers to have a full set of tools before a disaster occurs, without declaring a full State of Emergency, emergency managers can prevent loss and better support local jurisdictions and we respectfully request a **favorable report**.

For additional information please feel free to contact Catherine A. Kelly, Director, Legislative and Government Affairs, Maryland Military Department. By email: catherine.a.kelly26.nfg@mail.mil or by phone: 410-446-5390.