

COUNTY OF



ALLEGHENY

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COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Senate Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee
Hearing on Flooding, Landslides and Senate Bill 1131
Testimony of Matt Brown, Chief of Emergency Services

Senator Vulakovich and members, thank you for inviting me to join this panel today. I am proud to co-chair the Allegheny County Landslide and Flooding Task Force with Director Steve Shanley, head of Allegheny County Public Works. I thank County Executive Fitzgerald in his confidence in us with a task, that I must admit, is not an easy one.

We have seen extreme amounts of precipitation in the region this year. As the County Executive has mentioned, we've declared a state of emergency four times this year so far. Beginning in February through even yesterday, we have seen dozens upon dozens of communities try to recover from the extreme conditions that they're facing. Whether from flooding or landslides, municipalities have seen exposed piping and wires and downed poles, water and dirt covering their roads, their culverts filling with all kinds of debris and materials and have even seen the complete destruction of individual homes and properties. In one extreme case, we had a death earlier this year when a woman lost her life because of flooding in the south hills.

Resiliency is a cornerstone for the county, not only in emergency management but in all aspects of government. Due to the sheer volume of incidents this year, our combined capacity to recover continues to be in jeopardy. For many communities, they've barely recovered from one emergency when another follows. In emergency management, our focus is on planning and preparation. It's particularly fitting that this hearing is being held during National Preparation Month, as our efforts through Emergency Services and the Task Force is on preventing these things from happening, and whenever possible, preventing those disasters from worsening.

The goal of the Task Force has been to, first and foremost, understand what it is that we know and don't know. We've focused on sharing information between agencies and organizations which have a role in addressing this issue and will be determining if there are ways to help officials be aware of potential slides, and to share information and lessons learned widely to further inform and protect our community. To do so, our Task Force has separated into a number of working groups including a Steering Committee, Preparedness & Mitigation Committee, Response & Recovery Committee, and Funding Options Committee.

The membership of the group is fluid, allowing us to add representation from those organizations and agencies that come to our attention through this process. Thus far, we have a number of groups represented on the task force including the PA Emergency Management Agency, the University of

Pittsburgh (geologist), the National Weather Service (NWS) Pittsburgh, Carnegie Mellon University, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), the Army Corps of Engineers, and utilities. That is, of course, in addition to staff and resources from both of our departments, as well as Computer Services, Budget, and Economic Development.

From the emergency services perspective, we are particularly focused on preparedness, as well as response and recovery. Landslides cause 25-50 deaths and more than a billion dollars in damage each year. They can strike with little or no warning, travel 55-100 miles an hour, and can be caused by a large variety of reasons.

We are starting by working with our partners to identify where landslide hazards are in the county. What we've found is that we each have information about our own assets or areas of interest that can include details on slide prone areas, the location of steep slopes, and the location of red beds or clay. We also know what areas have had slides before and have information where groundwater and springs are located and other possible layers of information. It does none of us any good if we are the only ones with this information. Our first step was to take the information from all of our partners and map it. With the assistance of Computer Services, we have created GIS maps with multiple layers of information that each of our members have access to for their own planning, prevention and mitigation efforts.

I'll turn this over to Director Shanley to talk about what else we are looking at within the task force, and next steps, and will also be happy to answer questions from the committee at the conclusion of the testimony.