

# Local Government of the Future Subcommittee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations

Tuesday, March 22, 2022

*Note: This document is ACIR staff notes written during this subcommittee meeting. It is a public document and has been provided to meeting participants for their review and revised in accordance with any comments received but is not approved minutes of the meeting.*

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**ACIR Members present:** John Filchak, Martin Heft, Jim O’Leary, Francis Pickering, Brendan Sharkey (Chair), Lyle Wray (Vice-Chair)

**Other participants:** Brenda Bergeron, Bill Turner, Margaret Wirtenberg

**ACIR staff:** none

## 1. Call to order

Commission chair Sharkey called the meeting to order and noted remote meeting procedures.

## 2. Review of [2/25/2022 LGF meeting notes](#) and [draft 3/4/2022 ACIR minutes](#), if desired

There were no comments.

## 3. Intergovernmental emergency management system issues

- Discussion with DEMHS Deputy Commissioner Bergeron [2019 DEMHS memo](#) and [State Agency Training & Exercise Plan](#) (SATEP)

Commission chair Sharkey mentioned Commission member O’Leary’s request to bring this issue up with the group. He said the subcommittee decided last month to request that DEMHS Deputy Commissioner Bergeron attend today and thanked her for joining this meeting. Deputy Commissioner Bergeron introduced Bill Turner, the new State Emergency Management Director, and mentioned today is his first day with DEMHS.

Deputy Commissioner Bergeron provided an overview of the agency’s organization, noting that her focus today would be on the group involved with community preparedness, strategic planning and grants. She said the state is divided into five emergency planning regions and explained how they are organized and work with municipalities and COGs.

She described the [National Incident Management System](#) (NIMS) and the agency’s Incident Command System (ICS), which is organized into [Emergency Support Functions](#), each of which focuses on a specific discipline. She listed the fifteen state ESFs, providing further details about some, and added that some of the emergency management regions have additional ESFs. The state operates under the [State Response Framework](#) and she outlined its organization and relationships among the various entities involved.

Deputy Commissioner Bergeron said Commission member O’Leary’s question is about how the system worked during COVID. She said each disaster response is headed by the relevant lead agency with DEMHS functioning as the support agency, often in association with the National Guard. The Dept. of Public Health was the lead for COVID. She noted that different agencies have different levels of experience with NIMS, with social services and regulatory agencies generally having less.

Deputy Commissioner Bergeron mentioned the expectation for annual training and requirements for agencies to follow NIMS. She said there had been training at the beginning of the pandemic and described the state’s Unified Command meetings. They discussed the use of the NIMS and ICS during each of the early meetings and described ESF meeting discussions regarding significant issues to address within their specific discipline. She noted that emergency housing needs during the pandemic differ from those following a major storm and pointed out that the state’s approach to non-congregate housing for the homeless became a national best practice.

Deputy Commissioner Bergeron acknowledged the system does not always work perfectly but it worked in general. She provided further background regarding the operation of ESF7, Resource Support, to enable the distribution of needed supplies. She described the hurricane exercise planned for 2022 which becomes an opportunity to address other aspects of the system, such as the [State Agency Training & Exercise Plan](#) (SATEP). Each agency has an incident management team. She invited questions and Commission chair Sharkey thanked her for that explanation and asked Commission member O’Leary for his thoughts.

Commission member O’Leary said his focus has been on making everyone aware of MIMS and the SRF. He mentioned the [2019 DEMHS memo regarding SATEP](#) and said there could be a potential role for the ACIR. He asked Deputy Commissioner Bergeron for her thoughts. She said the administration is very supportive of the emergency management concept and noted that the short time between distribution of the SATEP and onset of the pandemic did not allow for the usual training and other follow-up. State agencies were receiving NIMS and ICS messaging and she feels the approach worked overall and added that a 2+ year disaster was unprecedented.

Commission chair Sharkey thanked Deputy Commissioner Bergeron and Commission member O’Leary. He added that the ACIR has questioned the ACIR role with this and said the necessary system would seem to be in place. Commission member Filchak said he believes the system has worked well but noted that the ACIR filled a role with its [COVID resources page](#), which provided guidance regarding the continuation of municipal functions during the pandemic. He provided an overview and said that might be void the ACIR can fill in the future on a more formal basis.

Deputy Commissioner Bergeron asked him to send further details about what the ACIR had done. She said DEMHS would like to work through a system that is already in place, like that. He noted some of the functions that were addressed and how it was done. She said they will take a look at it and it perhaps can be built into the SRF. Commission member Filchak said the ACIR can complement, not replace DEMHS’s role and pointed out the ACIR’s place working between the local, state, and federal level.

Margaret Wirtenberg reiterated the potential of the ACIR and Deputy Commissioner Bergeron said she had been unaware of the ACIR until Commission member O’Leary mentioned it to her. Being a standing group, it can be made part of the collaborative emergency management effort. Margaret Wirtenberg highlighted that the ACIR is a long-standing and nonpartisan group. Commission member O’Leary thanked Deputy Commissioner Bergeron and added that the ACIR’s role advising all levels of government can be of some assistance. She said this is an opportunity to make progress and offered to return in a few months to discuss how to fill gaps.

Commission chair Sharkey agreed with that approach and noted the ACIR’s request for increased staff support. There was further discussion of the ACIR’s statutory role and possible assistance.

Commission chair Sharkey also pointed out the problem of mismatches between the state's various regional districts and that there is a question whether emergency services districts might be a geography to use for other regions. There was a discussion of the original alignment of emergency management regions with the state's former regional planning organization regions.

#### 4. Property tax reform, [2022 DRS Tax Incidence Report](#), or other fiscal matters

Commission chair Sharkey said the full ACIR discussed property tax reform, the tax incidence study, and the role the ACIR might play. He noted Commission members Filchak's and Pickering's input regarding this topic Commission member Pickering mentioned a previous discussion among the three of them and Commission vice chair Wray regarding the need for good information, good grant-writing, and good structures. He recommended they have another call to discuss that further prior to the next meeting of the full ACIR

Commission member Filchak highlighted the recent release of DRS's second-ever tax incidence study and mentioned DRS Commissioner Boughton's [3/11/2022 briefing](#) of the [Finance, Revenue, and Bonding \(FRB\) Committee](#). He said the new report might have less information than was provided in [DRS's 2014 report](#). DRS strictly followed the statutory requirement for the new report, which left four taxes unexamined, preventing a 1:1 comparison with the previous report. Some new methodologies were used too.

Commission member Filchak mentioned [SB 443](#), which would change the tax incidence study, and provided an overview of [his testimony to the FRB Committee](#) regarding that bill. He noted that the state of MN spends \$100,000 to do each of its biannual "gold standard" tax incidence studies while the CT study was \$250,000 with a consultant. MN handles its studies in-house. He said he is troubled that property tax reform is not being approached structurally, the state is going after things that get attention.

Commission member Filchak said such work requires a more nuanced approach, not just breaking it down into quartiles and quintiles across the state. He said there can be significant tax burden differences between municipalities that appear to be socioeconomically comparable. Commission member Filchak agreed and noted his testimony's recommendations for a more granular approach. He also described the five recommendations at the end of the new DRS report and noted that two focus on the property tax. He also pointed out that without having a state policy center such as the ACIR has advocated for, the party in control at the time of such a study can influence if the study is done and if the findings are slanted.

Commission chair Sharkey said it will be interesting to see what property tax reform comes out of this year's legislative session. He planted the seed with Commissioner Boughton that the ACIR is here and available if the state is looking at the longer-term proposals we have discussed. The legislature might look to us for longer-term policy solutions and the Governor might be interested. He also said he had spoken with PD Committee Co-chair [Co-chair McCarthy Vahey](#) about [HB 5359](#), which could lead to the ACIR studying changes to the approach for local legal notices while accommodating FOI expectations. He noted that he said the ACIR wants to make itself available for such tasks but needs more staff support at OPM. The ACIR cannot depend on work by its members and other volunteers.

Margaret Wirtenberg said the timing is perfect because the state has funds and could provide staff for the ACIR to take on critical issues, noting its nonpartisan approach. Commission chair Sharkey said that, on the assumption that additional staff support will not be provided for the coming fiscal year, members should start laying the foundation for next year's sessions, with specific and creative recommendations. He suggested that the ACIR, as an independent statutory agency, could warrant having staff directly. He did note that they would have to be mindful of the fact that such agencies are often the first to have their budget cut. If we have staff, we can take on work in our nonpartisan manner.

Commission member Filchak mentioned [New York's Balance of Payments with the Federal Government](#), a recent report on by the [Rockefeller Institute of Government](#) that might be relevant. They looked at all 50 states and CT ranks last in its balance of payments with the federal government. It is not a surprise but this

is brand new research by a credible group and it shows other states getting more. Commission chair Sharkey said it is a great point and he cannot imagine a more worthwhile function for the ACIR than to take on work like this. He said the he, vice chair Wray, and Commission members should commit to discussing the broader topic and bringing it to the next week's meeting of the full ACIR.

Commission member O'Leary commented on Commission chair Sharkey's references to ACIR staffing and the ACIR's inability to dive into issues like it could when it had more staffing twenty years ago. It was not perfect, but what can we do to accomplish that? Does somebody need to be looking at grants to hire a contractor? It is self-evident that we need staff but what can we do instead of just talking about it?

Commission chair Sharkey outlined ACIR members' efforts, noting that the proposal to increase staff support at OPM would not likely yield staff who are 100% dedicated to the ACIR's work. They would play multiple roles, like Bruce does for OPM, but there would be more people. He also mentioned the financial implications of bringing people on through contracts funded by grants versus as full state employees. There are private sector sources that might help launch this. Even a six-month trial period might provide the horsepower to produce results regarding important things, demonstrating why the state should fund it.

Commission member Filchak mentioned [HB 5495](#), which in part proposes to reinstate the General Assembly's [Program Review and Investigations Committee](#). He does not know its prospects. There were discussions of the committee's hearing schedule and about the scope of the phone discussion to be scheduled prior to the next ACIR meeting.

## **5. Future research initiatives**

There was no further discussion

## **6. Other topics, if any**

There was no further discussion.

## **7. Next Meetings**

Commission chair Sharkey noted the ACIR will meet again on April 1 and wished everyone a happy spring.

## **8. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned.

*Notes prepared by Bruce Wittchen, OPM*