

SENATE LAW AND PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE, No. 264

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: JULY 19, 2010

The Senate Law and Public Safety Committee reports favorably Senate Bill No. 264.

The provisions of this bill implement certain recommendations of the Final Report of the Assembly Coastal New Jersey Evacuation Task Force, which was submitted to the Speaker of the General Assembly on May 23, 2008. Specifically, the purpose of the bill is to improve the current evacuation plans throughout the State in preparation for a catastrophic event or natural disaster, such as a hurricane or nor'easter.

Under the provisions of the bill, the Director of the State Office of Emergency Management (OEM) is to develop and undertake a number of initiatives. First, the bill requires that the director develop an annual public awareness program to educate the public concerning the State's plan to evacuate New Jersey's coastal areas in times of emergency.

The bill further requires the director to work in consultation with the Department of Health and Senior Services and the Department of Community Affairs, to appoint a commission comprised of experts from each department. The commission would be authorized to identify and reserve elementary and secondary school buildings to serve as temporary shelters during an emergency; allocate funding for the renovation of school buildings that do not meet the standard requirements for adequate sheltering so that they may serve as short term emergency shelters; and identify and reserve specific locations to serve as long term emergency shelters for the benefit of individuals who have been displaced from their residence for a period of greater than six months. Following the enactment of the bill, all schools in the State are to be constructed to serve as adequate shelters.

In addition, the bill provides for the creation of a separate State coastal operations team composed of experts from within the Division of State Police assigned to review and assess the county evacuation plans. Under the bill, it is the primary responsibility of the coastal operations team to ensure consistency among the various county evacuation plans, and integrate the county plans into a Statewide evacuation plan. The bill also requires the director of OEM to work in conjunction with the county emergency management coordinator in each county to locate and identify all critical infrastructure in the State that would be in need of an alternative emergency power generator in the event of a Statewide emergency.

The bill further provides that the State Police are to work in conjunction with county emergency management coordinators to implement a lane reversal strategy on the Atlantic City Expressway, the Garden State Parkway, and Route 287 in this State in preparation for an evacuation during an emergency. The bill prohibits the towing of trailers, and transportation of boats on public highways while any evacuation plan is in effect.

Under the provisions of the bill, each county is to establish a central registry for individuals with special needs who may need additional assistance during an emergency or local disaster emergency. The bill defines “special needs” as a physical or mental disability or medical care need of an individual who, after exhausting all other resources, still needs assistance for evacuation or sheltering before, during, or after a disaster or emergency.

Finally, the bill amends current law to provide for the expansion of the Emergency Operation Plans on the State, county and municipal level. Current law only requires the State and local Emergency Operation Plans to address the needs of farm animals and service animals during an emergency. The bill provides that these emergency plans are to be expanded in order to support the needs of domestic livestock and domesticated animals. Additionally, each Emergency Operations Plan is to include a provision specifically designed to address the needs and facilitate the safe and timely evacuation of the families and dependents of the emergency responders rendering major disaster or emergency services.

The bill further requires the counties and municipalities to include in their respective Emergency Operations Plans provisions that evaluate the evacuation procedures of hospitals and other health care facilities, alternative sources of care for evacuated patients, and proposed sites of temporary shelter in the event of an emergency. Under the bill, the State Office of Emergency Management is required to establish a Statewide evacuation strategy that will be based on evacuation plans submitted by the counties and municipalities.

This bill was pre-filed for introduction in the 2010-2011 session pending technical review. As reported, the bill includes the changes required by technical review, which has been performed.