

Beyond Preparation: The Critical Role of Advocacy in Advancing Emergency Management



Background

Emergency management professionals are trained to focus on the four phases of emergency management for the successful implementation and sustainment of a comprehensive program (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2015). However, advocacy remains an underutilized yet powerful tool for advancing the profession.

The Gap

Advocacy is essential for securing resources and building crucial relationships between practitioners, communities, and decision-makers.

Purpose

This research examines how the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) Region 1 designed and implemented strategic initiatives to strengthen the emergency management profession’s visibility, influence, and effectiveness through local and national advocacy activities. These initiatives were designed and implemented to achieve specific objectives associated with member interests and needs.

Objectives:

- Demonstrate the importance of advocacy in emergency management across sectors and practice settings.
- Showcase successful regional initiatives that are sustainable and translatable.
- Empower practitioners to engage meaningfully with elected officials.

Approach

Innovative Regional Strategic Program Design

Selected initiatives represent approaches specifically tailored to the unique challenges facing New England emergency managers and dynamic emergency management practice.

- Emerged from careful assessment of regional needs gathered from member value and needs assessments.
- Rejected one-size-fits-all approaches, adopting central themes with variable implementation strategies and topics.
- Created transferrable advocacy frameworks.
- Effectively navigate New England’s unique political landscape, governance structures, and complex community dynamics.
- Designed with a sustainability and adaptability focus.

Regional Advocacy Initiatives

Each initiative was designed through a targeted process that assessed regional needs and created replicable models for other jurisdictions.

Legislative Action

A state disaster relief fund for emergency management

IAEM Region 1 provided subject matter expertise and testimony in an effort to establish the first disaster relief fund in MA. It provides funding through the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for emergency disaster relief, including when a federal disaster aid threshold has not been met, or to supplement funding related to a federal or state declaration (Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 29, § 2HHHHHH (2025)).

Emergency Management Advocacy Day on Beacon Hill (MA)

Professionals from across Region 1 gathered for a day of advocacy, networking and engagement with MA state legislators. This event provided participants with an overview of the current state of emergency management within MA, an IAEM legislative update and discussion with legislative sponsors, and meetings with elected officials.

Emergency managers advocated for stronger policies, built connections with key decision-makers, and stayed informed of legislative developments locally and nationally.

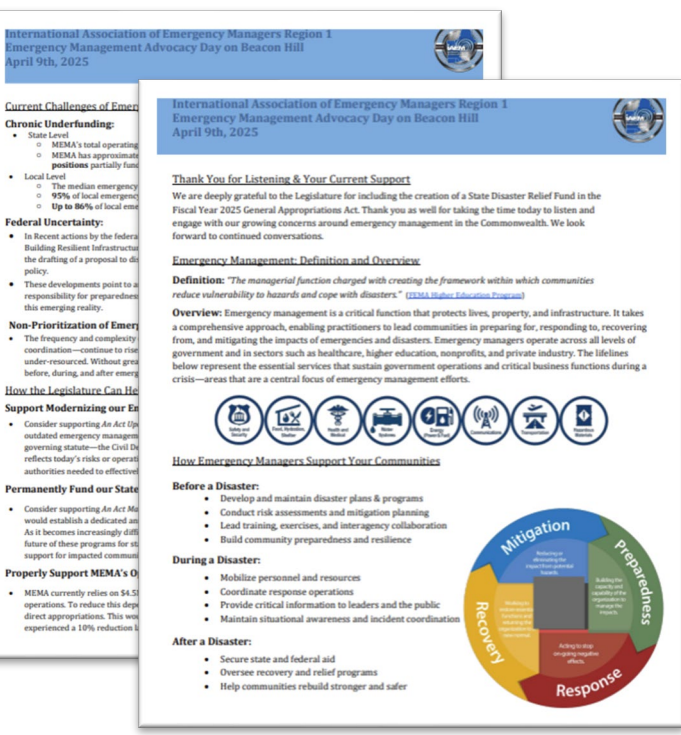


Figure 1. Leave-Behinds

Participants meeting with elected officials were given tools developed by IAEM Region 1 (2025) to support conversations and reinforce key topics for consideration.

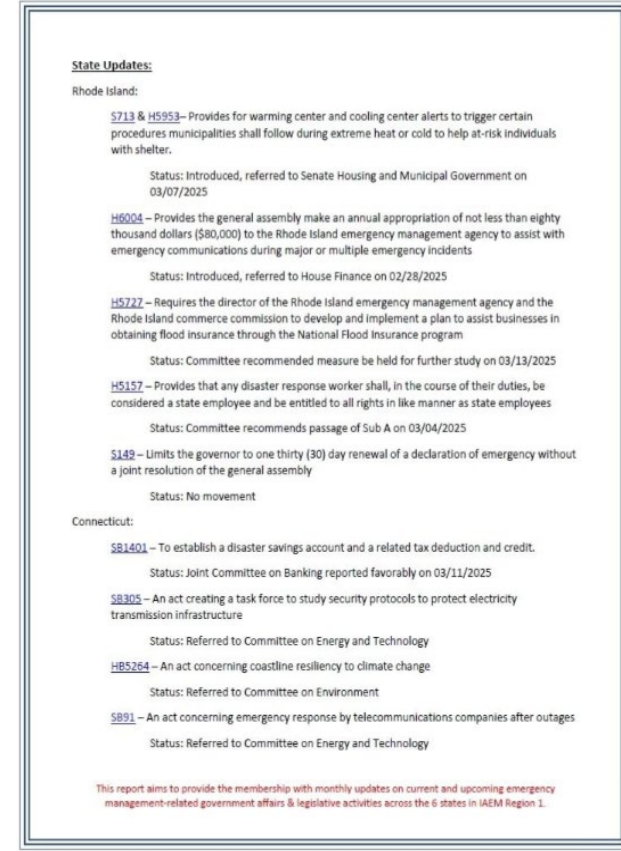
Government & Legislative Affairs Webinars

The IAEM Region 1 Government Affairs Advisor facilitated several member webinars to support awareness and understanding of rapid governmental changes to FEMA, state EM, and funding sources for emergency management. Members engaged in dialogue and provided impact statements to support advocacy efforts locally and nationally, elevating the voice of practitioners.

Government & Legislative Affairs Update

Region 1 members receive a monthly member newsletter, outlining applicable government affairs and legislative activity. These updates were provided to members by IAEM Region 1 and shared widely to support situational awareness (IAEM Region 1, 2025).

Figure 2. Government & Legislative Affairs Update



Other Initiatives

- **Letters to Governors** urging investment in state and local emergency management capabilities and structures.
- Multiple **visits to Washington, D.C.** to meet with key representatives and to advocate for emergency managers.
- **Lectures** on EM-related public policy at Massachusetts Maritime Academy.
- **Template letters** and **talking points** for policymakers.

Key Outcomes

Diverse and intentional programming supported IAEM Region 1 members in advancing their ability and desire to advocate for the profession, and their communities and organizations. These initiatives have achieved the following outcomes:

- **Greater Recognition:** Enhanced profession visibility among policymakers, including the development of new frameworks for engaging in meaningful dialogue with elected officials.
- **Improved Coordination:** Stronger relationships to address “wicked” problems unique to the region.
- **Enhanced Resilience:** Improvements in community preparedness through collaboration with policymakers.
- **Resource Allocation:** Increased support for emergency management through understanding of evolving emergency management priorities.

Implications and Next Steps

The mission of IAEM-USA is, “to foster resilience by engaging the diverse emergency management community through professional development, networking, information exchange, and *advocacy* (International Association of Emergency Managers [IAEM], (2024).” Advocacy, therefore, should not be viewed as an optional activity among practitioners. It is essential to advocate for the policies and resources needed to support those within the profession and the communities those practitioners serve.

In Region 1, advocacy is considered a primary driver of member value and engagement. Region 1 leadership intentionally crafted programming that provides the access to tools, resources, information, and networking platforms for members to build necessary relationships and engage in advocacy confidently.

Transferability

The tools, resources, and initiatives implemented within Region 1 are designed for flexibility. With minor adjustments, these initiatives and associated resources can be adapted applied within other regions, state and local emergency management agencies, professional associations in related fields, or organizations encountering similar advocacy challenges.

Conclusion

Strategic advocacy has emerged as an **essential competency** for emergency management professionals. The regional initiatives presented offer **replicable models** for strengthening the profession's influence, visibility, and effectiveness.

References

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Please contact the IAEM Region 1 President for access to tools, resources, templates, and example materials.

Thank you to the IAEM-USA Region 1 Board and membership for your contributions to this important work.