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OKLAHOMA CITY – Oklahoma Governor Mary Fallin's administration rejected a plan to distribute debit cards worth \$1,200 – funded with federal money – to tornado-stricken families early this week after determining that more traditional efforts were meeting the affected area's needs.

"The governor has conveyed to all her agency heads, all her Cabinet directors, her staff, all of state government from the top down that this is a crisis of the most serious nature, and our state government needs to respond in the most compassionate and helpful way that it can," said Fallin spokesman Alex Weintz.

But when Oklahoma Department of Human Services Director Ed Lake suggested Monday that the state use up to \$10 million in unspent federal Temporary Aid to Needy Families money for emergency relief payments, the idea was rejected.

Lake said he had used a similar response to natural disasters in Tennessee when he was the deputy commissioner of human services there and that the effort had worked well.

He said he texted the idea to Secretary of Finance and Revenue Preston Doerflinger early Monday and told DHS workers to start working on the plan.

Later in the day, he had a discussion about the idea with Doerflinger and Fallin's chief of staff, Denise Northrup, at the state emergency operations command center, and Monday afternoon Doerflinger called him and said the Governor's Office wasn't interested in pursuing the idea, he said.

Weintz said the Governor's Office decided not to pursue the idea for now because

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Millions of dollars in donations have flowed to the area, and as of Wednesday only about 130 people remained in shelters, he said.

While Lake had implemented a similar effort in Tennessee, it had never been tried in Oklahoma, and the Governor's Office was concentrating on making sure emergency response efforts such as search and rescue had sufficient support, Weintz said.

"By the end of the day, our administration called him back and essentially indicated to him it was not something we were going to act on for now," Weintz said.

Lake was told to make sure the agency's traditional clients in the affected areas were getting the services they needed, Weintz said.

Lake said there would have been no way to "means test" the people receiving the aid – so a millionaire whose home was destroyed could have gotten a \$1,200 debit card – but in Tennessee, subsequent checking found that only people with legitimate needs were receiving the assistance.

After discussing the issue with the Governor's Office on Monday, Lake said he was satisfied with the decision.

While he had wanted to move ahead with the idea, he agreed that the "robust" response of traditional relief agencies makes the Oklahoma tornados different from situations he had dealt with in Tennessee.

A prominent Democrat legislator from south Oklahoma County said he had not heard of Lake's suggestion until he was contacted by the Tulsa World.

"While I understand that it would be setting new ground for Oklahoma to take such an approach in a time of emergency – considering that other states had implemented a similar program – to ensure that the Oklahoma victims of this tornado would have

received as much assistance as possible in their time of need, for the Governor's

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