



Tuesday March 17, 2020

TO: Shane Pendergrass, Chair of House Health and Government Operations Committee and Committee Members

POSITION: Support SB 721 Emergency Management – Chief Resilience Officer – Appointment and Duties

Position:

The above organizations strongly support SB 721 offered by Senator Hester. SB 721 would establish the Chief Resilience Officer position within the Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA). This new position would be responsible for increasing planning capacity, developing baselines and metrics for success, coordinating state and local responses to climate impacts, incorporating vulnerable private industries into programs and strategies, and identifying and streamlining funding streams for building resilience. The Chief Resilience Officer would be incorporated into existing state resilience and adaptation building through membership on the Maryland Commission on Climate Change and through involvement in the State Hazard Mitigation Plan development. The position would allow the State and local governments to capitalize on significant changes at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) through new funding opportunities aimed at pre-disaster mitigation.

Background:

Climate change impacts are felt across Maryland today and will only increase in intensity and severity in the coming years. Our state's most significant threats are currently experienced through increased sea level rise and erosion, changes in precipitation, including increased frequency of flash floods and storm surge, and increased temperatures. In many places, these issues compound each other. Parts of the State that were susceptible to flooding from past storms now experience nuisance flooding on a far more regular basis, resulting in damaged infrastructure and disruption to emergency services.

In Maryland, we have already observed one foot of sea level rise since the turn of the 20th century with an additional two feet of rise predicted by 2050. By 2100, studies predict up to five additional feet of sea level rise. Currently, over \$15 billion in property is directly in the path of that rise. Land subsidence accelerates rates of erosion, thereby compounding the risks from sea level rise. Cities like Annapolis have seen a doubling in coastal flood days over the past decade when compared to the previous one. On the Eastern Shore, Dorchester County is predicted to go from the 4th largest county by land area to the 14th by 2100. Across the state, 81,000 people are threatened by coastal flooding and with predicted rise an additional 38,000 will be in jeopardy by 2050. Sea level rise puts property, infrastructure and critical natural resources at risk. However, flooding is not the only issue created by sea level rise. Saltwater is creeping up through the water table, and intrusion on the Eastern shore is harming farmers' crop yields.

Changes in precipitation patterns exacerbate sea level rise impacts, but also flooding issues in inland and riverine environments. More frequent and intense storm events are overburdening critical infrastructure like roads, sewer systems and the electric grid. As a state, we have spent billions of dollars improving our storm and wastewater infrastructure to protect water quality in the Bay. Increased precipitation and storm severity could directly undermine those investments. Especially in coastal areas which is compounded by sea level rise. For example, infrastructure damage from Hurricane Sandy caused 84.3 million gallons of sewage to be released into the Bay. Precipitation changes in Western Maryland are making our forests less resilient to pests and pathogens. These issues have human health impacts; we are seeing increases in human disease vectors including ticks and mosquitoes.

Increases in temperature are having human health impacts. In Baltimore City it is up to 21 degrees hotter than in surrounding rural areas on average. By 2050, the city is estimated to experience 5 times as many dangerous heat days, meaning a heat index over 105°F, as we did at the start of the century. These impacts are not limited to cities; across

Maryland, we average 10 days a year when heat exceeds dangerous levels. This number is predicted to rise to 40 days annually by 2050.

Each of these impacts demonstrates Maryland's need for increased services, funding and capacity from the federal, state and local governments. SB 721 creates a new position within MEMA that allows for improved responses, reduced risk and a pathway for a more proactive approach to mitigating and limiting climate impacts. Many of the practices and solutions we need to implement require coordination across several agencies and local jurisdictional boundaries. The State has a multitude of programs across many agencies that improve resilience. Creating this position in MEMA will allow for greater incorporation of emergency management techniques within those projects and programs. This position will also be able to help those agencies identify other programs and funding streams that will contribute to resilience in Maryland. Recently we have seen a significant increase in federal funds that have been made available to build resilience (\$300-\$500M annually).

At the federal level, FEMA is improving their funding streams for pre-disaster mitigation, a risk reduction and mitigation strategy that currently goes widely unfunded in Maryland. Alongside this approach comes new funding opportunities through the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Program. This program allocates 6% of the previous year's expenditures toward building resilience. These funds are awarded through competitive grants and aim to fund large, ambitious projects that address multiple issues. By creating the Chief Resilience Officer in MEMA, we will improve Maryland's ability to access these funds through increasing levels of coordination across the state and codifying a position focused on pre-disaster mitigation.

Due to the overwhelming climate threats to our State and the increasingly urgent need to move toward more proactive approaches for building resilience, the Conservancy strongly supports the creation of the Chief Resilience Officer position. Adding the lens of disaster risk reduction to our resilience building projects and programs will not only strengthen and protect our communities, but also lend itself to accessing increased streams of federal funds. Greater capacity will allow state agencies to better recognize opportunities for projects that meet their legislated mandates of promoting clean water and citizen health, while also improving Maryland's ability to adapt and persist in the face of a changing environment.

Therefore, we urge a favorable report on SB 721.