

City of Annapolis
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Office of Emergency Management
Director Kevin J. Simmons
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In Support of MD 2023 HB 789
Public Safety - State Disaster Recovery Fund

Appropriations Committee Hearing
Thursday, March 9, 2023

Chair Barnes, Vice-Chair Chang, and fellow members of the Appropriations Committee:

I am Chris Meyd, Emergency Management Planner for the City of Annapolis Office of Emergency Management. I offer this testimony today in support of House Bill 789, a bill that fills a critical need for dedicated State disaster recovery funding that can be accessed by local units of government to assist Maryland communities impacted by localized disasters when they do not receive federal disaster assistance.

Currently in Maryland, there is a significant capability gap in offering State disaster recovery funding when localized disasters, such as tornadoes, microburst storms, severe flooding, or similar events, occur in municipal towns and cities that do not meet the eligibility requirements for a federal disaster declaration or the federal recovery assistance that comes with the declaration.

With the State's current disaster recovery mechanisms, local governments, like the City of Annapolis, are often limited in resources to provide the necessary recovery assistance to its impacted residents, businesses, and nonprofit organizations within the community. These services include providing financial assistance to individuals and households in the form of low-interest loans or grants, providing disaster case management services to disaster survivors, and the ability to better serve our most vulnerable and underserved communities with more equitable access to the State's current disaster relief programs. HB 789 directly addresses these limitations with the establishment of the State Disaster Recovery Fund to be administered by the Maryland Department of Emergency Management and the appointed Local Emergency Managers throughout the State.

In the aftermath of the 2021 Annapolis Tornado, in which over 100 homes, businesses, and local nonprofit organizations were damaged or destroyed in the Parole neighborhood, I served as the local disaster case management worker to assist community members with their recovery. My experiences while serving in this role brought to my attention, and the attention of the Annapolis community, that there are significant limitations on the authorities which allow for the State government to provide direct assistance to local residents who are impacted by such disasters. With the current mechanisms for the State's disaster assistance programs, residents have described to me their extensive challenges in accessing State disaster housing programs, dealing with insurance companies, and navigating State bureaucracy, all of which has ultimately led to immense financial hardships that they are still trying to recover from, a year and 6-months since the tornado first upended their lives.

The Parole neighborhood of Annapolis has a large community of vulnerable and underserved populations, including seniors living on fixed incomes and families living at or below the poverty

level in generational housing that are often uninsured or underinsured. As recognized in the the *Recommendations for the Establishment of a State Disaster Relief Fund report to the Maryland General Assembly* as required by SB310/Ch. 491, 2022 and HB386/Ch. 490, 2022, the impacts of disasters on vulnerable and underserved populations are greater and require a more equitable recovery process. The current patchwork of State disaster relief and recovery programs, their eligibility requirements, application processes, and delivery mechanisms are overly complex and difficult to manage for these communities. A dedicated, accessible fund is needed to help more effectively and equitably meet the needs of this community, and other communities like Parole throughout the State, after a disaster.

Through these experiences in responding to the Annapolis tornado incident, the Annapolis Office of Emergency Management has identified that there is a significant need for a State funding source that can help build and sustain capacity for local disaster case managers when localized disasters occur. The ability for a portion of the State Disaster Recovery Fund to be utilized for disaster case management services significantly increases the ability for the City of Annapolis and other local governments to better help and assist their community members to quickly access the programs and services that can be funded by the State Disaster Recovery Fund.

With the growing frequency of localized disasters occurring in Maryland that are not eligible for federal disaster assistance, local governments, including the City of Annapolis, look to State programs for additional assistance and resources after all local resources have been exhausted. By having a single, coordinated recovery fund program administered by emergency management professionals, local disaster recovery efforts can better ensure that the impacted communities have access to recovery funds and are able to receive the benefits they are eligible for.

I respectfully request that the Appropriations Committee look favorably upon this legislation and move to support the establishment of the State Disaster Recovery Fund.

Sincerely,



Christopher W. Meyd
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