

COURTNEY WATSON
Legislative District 9B
Howard County

Economic Matters Committee

Subcommittees

Banking, Consumer Protection,
and Commercial Law

Property and Casualty Insurance

Vice Chair, Democratic Caucus



Annapolis Office
The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 350
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3077 · 301-858-3077
800-492-7122 Ext. 3077
Courtney.Watson@house.state.md.us

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 17, 2021

HB0542 (SB0062) Emergency Management – Chief Resilience Officer –
Appointment and Duties

SPONSOR: Delegate Courtney Watson

POSITION: Testimony in SUPPORT with Amendment

Good afternoon Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk and members of the committee.
Thank you for allowing me to present House Bill 542.

Over the past two years, I have had the honor of serving as the Delegate representing District 9B which includes Ellicott City. Like many communities in your own district, Ellicott City has been grappling with the issues of climate change and catastrophic flooding - not as some far off and hypothetical danger, but as an all too real aspect of daily life. The experience of my constituents, living through two “thousand-year floods” over the course of two years, is of a magnitude that I hope is not indicative of the direction of our vulnerable communities. But as a coastal state with a great deal of inland tributaries, we as policy makers should be concerned about the implications of climate change and sea level rise on the projected increase in frequency and severity of flooding, and other environmental emergencies threatening Marylanders. Today, 81,000 Marylanders are at risk of coastal flooding, with 38,000 more individuals projected to also be at risk by 2050. In the same time frame, our state is projected to face up to \$19 billion worth of damage due to sea level rise and flooding. We are capable of preparing for and managing a threat of this magnitude, but doing so will require a great deal of thoughtfulness, coordination, and accountability. This bill will create the position of the Chief Resilience Officer (CRO) within the Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), responsible for:

- coordinating state and local agencies engaged in building resilience to risks related to climate change, as identified in the Maryland Hazard Mitigation Plan;
- leveraging funding streams and technical resources at the Federal, State, and Local levels to support Maryland resilience efforts;

- working with the Adaptation and Resiliency Workgroup of the Maryland Commission on Climate Change to coordinate resilience strategy across state agencies and update the resilience strategy for the State;
- working with the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science (UMCES) to establish baseline indicators, goals, and metrics to guide resilience efforts and to produce an economic analysis of the state's resilience efforts;
- working with the Department of the Environment to review the State's Flood Insurance Rate Maps;
- and engaging with stakeholders in industries impacted by climate change.

This bill also includes a requirement for the CRO to produce a report that would include an overview of the CRO's yearly activities to bring transparency to the CRO's role, as well as to guide the State's long term resilience strategy. The more capacity we have to coordinate these efforts, the more efficient Maryland's resilience system will be as a whole - saving lives and livelihoods, and reducing the costs of natural disasters in the process. Having an individual who is responsible for and dedicated to the coordination of these complex and ambitious goals will allow Maryland to make sure every dollar and minute we spend on resilience goes as far as possible to benefit each and every one of our communities.

The climate around the world is changing at an accelerating rate. Agriculture in the Mid-Atlantic region is particularly vulnerable to these changes. Changes in temperature, precipitation patterns, and sea-level rise individually are significant; collectively, their impacts will be enormous. For example, in Maryland, these changes can lead to, among others, increases in pests, disease, and weed pressure; disruptions in planting and harvesting dates; decreases in quantity and quality of food produced; loss of arable land due to saltwater intrusion; and increased risk of premature bloom of fruit crops. A climate vulnerability assessment of Maryland agriculture is sorely needed to prepare for, adapt to and protect this valuable industry (and associated jobs) in the State.

That is why this bill has been amended to authorize the Maryland Department of Agriculture and the Harry R. Hughes Center for AgroEcology to initiate an impact assessment study that advises the agriculture community and those dependent on it on:

- 1) the current state of knowledge, data, and expertise available;
- 2) current and projected threats to Maryland agriculture;
- 3) stakeholders impacted by climate change; key individuals and entities;
- 4) stakeholders that should participate in the development of a plan and what their respective roles should be.

Testifying in support today, we have:

- Dave Nemazie, Chief of Staff, University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science
- Kelly Leo, Maryland Resilient Coasts Program Director at The Nature Conservancy
- Jim Bass, Eastern Shore Land Conservancy

- Erie Shea, President of Solutions from the Land will speak about and in favor of the amendment.

A written letter in support of the bill has also been signed and submitted by the following organizations:

The Nature Conservancy MD/DC

ShoreRivers

Climate Law and Policy Project

Clean Water Action

Maryland Legislative Coalition

Annapolis Green

Women Indivisible Strong Effective (WISE)

Safe Skies Maryland

Chesapeake Bay Foundation

Indivisible Howard County

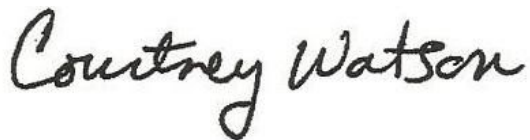
MLC Climate Justice Wing

Takoma Park Mobilization Environment Committee

Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

I respectfully request a favorable with amendment report from the committee. Thank you for your consideration of this bill. I am happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,



Delegate Courtney Watson

Howard County District 9B

Adaptation and Resiliency Workgroup of the MD Commission on Climate Change

- 1) Support the CRO in coordinating efforts across state agencies.
- 2) Assist the CRO in producing an updated adaptation and resilience strategy
- 3) Review and alter the membership of the Workgroup at the request of the CRO

The University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science

- 1) Assist the CRO in establishing baseline goals and indicators for the resilience efforts of the State.
- 2) Assist the CRO in producing an economic analysis and policy benchmark report on the State's resilience efforts.
- 3) Assist the CRO in identifying potential State, Federal, and private sources of necessary resilience resources.

Maryland Department of the Environment

- 1) Assist the CRO in reviewing and developing recommendations for Maryland's Flood Insurance Rate Maps

Chief Resilience Officer

- 1) Oversee the development of a State Resiliency Strategy
- 2) Coordinate efforts across State and Local agencies
- 3) Identify and secure funding streams and technical assistance across all levels of government
- 4) Work with business leaders from industries vulnerable to risks identified in the Maryland Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Outcomes

- 1) Increased coordination of Federal, State, Local, and private resilience efforts
- 2) Identification, securing, and optimization of Federal, State, and Local funding streams.
- 3) Creation of a State Resiliency Strategy, coordinated with the Maryland Hazard Mitigation Plan
- 4) A systematic review of the State's Flood Insurance Rate Maps
- 5) Establishment of resilience baselines and metrics to monitor ongoing resilience efforts