



Wednesday February 17, 2021

**HB 542 Emergency Management – Chief Resilience Officer – Appointment and Duties
Position: Favorable**

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

The undersigned organizations support HB 542 offered by Delegate Watson. This legislation seeks to create a Chief Resilience Officer in the Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), which is tasked with coordinating activities across many state agencies, making connections between the work of those agencies and the needs of local governments, and identifying and securing funding streams for resilience efforts. 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 at a minimum, with additional involvement to be determined after an extensive review of agency initiative to-date upon instatement, thereby building from the strong foundation that initiatives like the Maryland Adaptation Framework provide. At the federal level, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is improving funding streams for proactive pre-disaster mitigation. Currently, this is a risk reduction and mitigation strategy that goes widely unfunded in Maryland. This new position would allow our state and local governments to capitalize on these significant changes at FEMA, taking advantage of new funding opportunities aimed at pre-disaster mitigation.

We are already experiencing climate change impacts across Maryland and these will only increase in frequency and severity in the coming years. The most significant threats we are currently experiencing are due to 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 are compounded. 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. Increases in temperature are also harming human health; in Baltimore City, temperatures reach up to 21°F hotter than in surrounding rural areas. By 2050, the city is estimated to experience five times as many dangerous heat days with 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 ten days a year when heat exceeds dangerous levels. This number is predicted to rise to forty

days annually by 2050. Increased capacity, resources services, funding, leadership, and connectivity between federal and state agencies and local governments is necessary to address these growing threats and local needs.

The new position that HB 542 seeks to create within MEMA allows for improved responses, reduced risk, and a pathway for a more proactive, comprehensive approach to mitigating and limiting climate and natural disaster impacts. Many of the practices and solutions we need to implement require coordination across several agencies and local jurisdictional boundaries. Fortunately, the state already has a multitude of programs in place across many agencies that improve resilience; however, creating this position in MEMA will expand upon that work and investment by promoting greater incorporation of emergency management perspectives within those projects and programs. This position will also be able to help state agencies identify other programs and funding streams across multiple levels of government that can be paired to ensure more equitable access to resilience funding for many of Maryland's frontline, smaller, and most threatened communities.

One example of this approach is new funding opportunities through the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) 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 made possible by codifying a position focused on pre-disaster mitigation.

In our region and across the nation, states and cities have already taken the lead by establishing similar positions. From Virginia to New Jersey, Philadelphia, Louisiana, North Carolina, Oregon, Florida, Colorado, Rhode Island, and Boston, to name a few, each of these states and cities have used this capacity to establish networks for sharing information about how to maximize resilience by providing cohesive, strategic, and cross-jurisdictional leadership at the necessary scale. Establishing a Chief Resilience Officer will elevate Maryland among the ranks of the nation's resilience leaders and allow our state to access the same benefits for our agencies, local governments, and vulnerable economic sectors.

Adding the lens of disaster risk reduction to our resilience building projects and programs will not only protect our communities and economy, but also lends itself to accessing increased streams of federal funds. We commend Delegate Watson on introducing this bill, which will strengthen Maryland's approach to disaster mitigation and climate change, protect public health and safety, and generate new capacity, networks, funding, and resources to build a more resilient Maryland.

Therefore, we urge a favorable report on HB 542.

The Nature Conservancy MD/DC
Climate Law & Policy Project
Maryland Legislative Coalition
Women Indivisible Strong Effective (WISE)
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Indivisible Howard County
MLC Climate Justice Wing
Takoma Park Mobilization Environment Committee
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

ShoreRivers
Clean Water Action
Annapolis Green
Safe Skies Maryland