

**HB0706 - Maryland Department of Emergency Management - Office of Resilience**

**Date: February 18, 2022**

**Committee: House Environment & Transportation Committee**

**Position: Favorable**

**Victoria Venable, Maryland Director - Chesapeake Climate Action Network Action Fund**

On behalf of the Chesapeake Climate Action Network Action Fund, I urge a favorable report from the committee on **HB0706 - Maryland Department of Emergency Management - Office of Resilience**.

The CCAN Action Fund is the advocacy arm of Chesapeake Climate Action Network, a grassroots organization dedicated exclusively to fighting for bold and just solutions to climate change in the Chesapeake region of Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, DC. As we make efforts to mitigate climate change, we must also plan and prepare for the impacts of climate change that are no longer avoidable. With over 3,000 miles of tidal shoreline, Maryland is one of the [most climate-vulnerable states in America](#) – just from sea-level rise. To effectively prepare for the now inevitable impacts of climate change, our state should be investing in human capacity and state system infrastructure to build resilience, a goal at the core of HB706.

HB706 will establish an Office of Resilience in the Maryland Department of Emergency Management (MDEM). The Office will be led by a Chief Resilience Officer who will be responsible for coordinating state and local efforts to build resilience to risks identified in the Maryland Hazard Mitigation Plan. Importantly, this office will be responsible for identifying and securing funding streams for resilience efforts, a role that is increasingly important as our federal partners invest more in resiliency.

According to the [Center for Climate and Energy Solutions](#), state-level resilience planning can focus state agencies on climate risks and preparedness and can promote collaboration across regions and between the public and private sectors. This is evident in the structure of the bill, which directs the Office of Resilience to coordinate with Departments of Environment, Labor, Housing and Community Development, Transportation, and more. This will be a key role for the Office of Resilience - guiding the coordination between the many state departments that will be impacted by climate change and other threats. Building resilience can also better prepare our state for non-climate hazards such as national security threats and health crises.


Another important provision in the bill is the requirement that the Office of Resilience and the Chief Officer prioritize vulnerable communities and environmental justice. This will be a crucial

part of ensuring that our effort to build resilience does not leave communities behind or exacerbate existing burdens. There is ample research highlighting how efforts to build resilience can compound issues like housing affordability, health equity, and climate adaptation if equity is not carefully considered.

Prior to working at Chesapeake Climate Action Network, I did my Masters's work in Public Policy at Oregon State University, where I focused on the social equity considerations of climate resiliency planning. My research showed that when cities take on resiliency projects without effectively including a justice and equity lens in their planning the resilience gap between demographic groups often widens. In fact, census tracts in cities that did not include strong diversity, equity, and inclusion principles in their resilience planning of newly implemented flood risk reduction projects experienced increases in gentrification and housing burden, leading to significant barriers to resiliency.

Maryland cities have already seen the harsh impacts of climate change in flooding, heat advisories, and extreme weather events, including [two "1000-year floods" to Ellicott City in just 22 months](#). Notably, the [lowest-lying neighborhoods](#) of Baltimore and Annapolis, which are disproportionately communities of color, are [regularly experiencing flooding](#) due to sea-level rise and increased precipitation. Building climate resilience in our urban areas is critically important and we must center the most vulnerable communities in this work.

Thank you for your consideration of HB706. For all the reasons stated above, we urge a favorable vote from the committee.



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