



Friday, February 18, 2022

HB 706 Maryland Department of Emergency Management – Office of Resilience

Position: Favorable

TO: Kumar Barve, Chair of the House Environment and Transportation Committee and Committee Members

The undersigned organizations support HB 706 offered by Delegate Sample-Hughes. This legislation seeks to establish an Office of Resilience and a Chief Resilience Officer position to direct the newly formed Office under the Maryland Department of Emergency Management (MDEM). This new Office and position will be responsible for guiding resilience initiatives across Maryland by working closely with state agencies and local governments. This office will also be responsible for identifying and securing funding streams for these resilience efforts. At the federal level, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is improving funding streams for proactive pre-disaster mitigation. This new position would allow our state and local governments to capitalize on these significant changes at FEMA by 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. In many places, these impacts are compounded. Parts of the state that were susceptible to flooding from past storms are now experiencing nuisance flooding on a far more regular basis, resulting in damaged infrastructure and disruption to emergency services. This legislation pursues a solution to this issue by pairing the new office with the Maryland Department of Transportation to advance initiatives such as nature-based solutions in roadway upgrades, redesign, and removal projects that will reduce flooding and improve habitat health and connectivity.

Across Maryland, we are averaging 10 days a year when heat exceeds dangerous levels. This number is predicted to rise to 40 days annually by 2050. Under this legislation, the new office

will work with the Department of Housing and Community Development to ensure that communities most impacted by increasing heat have access to air conditioning. The legislation also prioritizes investing in frontline communities and promoting environmental justice in climate and hazard mitigation.

While reducing emissions is absolutely crucial to avoid the worst climate impacts, we know that our communities are already being harmed and, due to committed warming, will still face these growing challenges for years to come. Mitigation and adaptation must go hand in hand in order to best protect current and future generations from a daunting climate legacy. Increased capacity, resources, services, funding, leadership, and connectivity between federal and state agencies and local governments are necessary to address these growing threats and local needs.

The new Office and Director position within MDEM allows for improved responses, reduced risk, and a pathway for a more proactive, comprehensive approach to alleviating climate and natural disaster impacts. Fortunately, the state already has a multitude of programs in place across many agencies that improve resilience; however, creating this office and position within MDEM will expand upon that work and investment by better incorporating emergency management perspectives within those projects and programs. The office will assist with administering federal prevention, protection, mitigation and recovery-focused programs as well as state mitigation grants and loans. In collaboration with state agencies, the Office will develop flood risk assessment tools for use by the state and local governments and provide services, such as technical assistance, to support developing resiliency plans. Housing these responsibilities within one state Office will ensure resilience investments prioritize frontline communities and that environmental justice considerations are made at the forefront of these programs and state services.

One example of this approach is 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 Office of Resilience in MDEM and appointing a Chief Resilience Officer, we will improve Maryland's ability to access these funds. Furthermore, in order to meet the flood risk assessment tools development goal, the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) will work with the Office of Resilience to update flood maps for current and projected precipitation levels. Using these updated maps and in conjunction with the latest scientific findings on sea level rise, state agencies, local governments, and the Office of Resilience can then work together to advance adaptation planning, including through designing corridors for marsh migration and strategizing for managed retreat in ways which protect habitat and wildlife functions as well as communities' needs. By working collaboratively and utilizing existing agency expertise, the Chief Resilience Officer will be able to direct investments to areas of greatest need in Maryland.

In our region and across the nation, states and cities have already taken the lead by establishing similar positions and offices. Cities like Boston and Philadelphia and many states, including Virginia, New Jersey, Louisiana, North Carolina, Oregon, Florida, Colorado, and Rhode Island, 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 an Office of Resilience and appointing 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 a disaster risk reduction lens 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 Sample-Hughes on introducing, and Delegate Watson for co-sponsoring, 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 706.

Signed,

The Nature Conservancy, Maryland/DC
Sierra Club Maryland Chapter
Audubon Mid-Atlantic
Safe Skies Maryland
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland
Indivisible Howard County
Maryland Legislative Coalition
Climate Law & Policy Project
Chesapeake Climate Action Network Action Fund
Blue Water Baltimore