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In Support of MD 2023 SB 650 as Amended
Public Safety - State Disaster Recovery Fund Bill
House Appropriations Committee

March 23, 2023

Chairman Ben Barnes
Vice-Chairman Mark Chang
Appropriations Committee
Room 121
House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Chairman Barnes and Vice-Chairman Chang:

As the local emergency managers for the City of Annapolis and Anne Arundel County, and co-chairs of the State Disaster Relief Fund Workgroup pursuant to Senate Bill 310/Chapter 491 and House Bill 386/Chapter 490 of 2022, we write to you today to urge your committee's support in adopting the amended version of Senate Bill 650 as referred to the House Appropriations Committee and to forego amendments made to House Bill 789 as it currently stands.

The current amended version of the HB789 presents significant concerns for local emergency managers as it does not adequately fill the gaps identified by the State Disaster Relief Fund Working Group in its recommendations to the Maryland General Assembly. It is the recommendation of the Workgroup to create a unified state approach to disaster relief that can provide quick access to funding for existing state disaster relief programs and to provide a mechanism for direct assistance to individuals suffering from the impacts of local disasters. Additionally, HB789, as currently amended, does not identify any policy, thresholds, or access procedures for requesting or granting funding from the Catastrophic Event Account (CEA) for relief efforts by either State agencies or local units of government like the City of Annapolis and Anne Arundel County.

The City of Annapolis and Anne Arundel County, along with other counties and municipalities throughout the state, may be adversely affected by the amended version of HB789 in that the proposed amendment does not leverage a coordinated, statewide recovery effort but rather increases the possibility for more patchworked recovery and may even perpetuate divisions and inconsistencies among jurisdictions that will result in even slower response times or more limited access to assistance by those most in need.

The amended version of the HB789 could also limit the City of Annapolis' and Anne Arundel County's eligibility for federal disaster assistance if CEA funds were used out of sequence from federal disaster funding requirements. Having the Fund administered by the Maryland Department of Emergency Management in conjunction with the local emergency managers helps to ensure all funding requirements are properly adhered to

and that industry experts in emergency management and disaster recovery are able to establish the policies and procedures needed to get assistance to impacted communities as efficiently and equitably as possible.

It has been a year and six months since the devastating EF-2 tornado struck the City of Annapolis and Anne Arundel County and many residents are still trying to recover from the impacts to their homes and businesses due to a failed recovery system. Many of these residents live on fixed incomes, have low incomes, or reside in generational housing and are unable to absorb the impacts caused by such disasters. The establishment of the State Disaster Recovery Fund in lieu of the Catastrophic Event Account would help to ensure our more vulnerable populations would have access to more timely and efficient recovery assistance that the CEA is unable to provide even with the proposed changes. Simply put, the CEA is not an effective or efficient mechanism to support disaster relief and recovery operations in Maryland and there is much need for the State Disaster Recovery Fund which establishes both a program and policy to better implement disaster recovery initiatives across the state.

We respectfully request that the Appropriations Committee take into consideration these concerns and move forward with the establishment of the State Disaster Recovery Fund as the primary mechanism for state funded disaster recovery in Maryland.

Sincerely,



Kevin J. Simmons
Director, Office of Emergency Management
City of Annapolis, Maryland

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