

January 30, 2026

Senate Bill 225

Testimony by Winnie Carpenter, Founder — Oella-Catonsville Flood Solutions

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB225 (*Environment - Interjurisdictional Watersheds — Flood Management*.)

Thank you to Senator Mary Washington and our Senator Ben Brooks for sponsoring the Bill.

I have been a lifelong resident of Maryland, and have lived in Oella, in Baltimore County, for the past 22 years. Oella is a small mill village, with no post office, so we have been assigned a Howard County zip code — 21043, Ellicott City.

Having that designation has reduced our voice during flood events. It is a well known fact that Howard County floods in Ellicott City, but flooding also occurs in Ellicott City, *Baltimore County*.

I have included Exhibits for your review.

In 1972, Hurricane Agnes devastated areas on *both* sides of the Patapsco River, in Howard and in Baltimore County. All the flood damage in 1972 was caused by bottom-up flooding from the Patapsco River. Infrastructure damage occurred to shops, roads, and homes — the Patapsco River bridge wasn't rebuilt for a year. The Trolley Stop restaurant in Baltimore County has preserved the "flood line" in their back room to share with patrons. The walls are lined with pictures from the 1972 flood.

Two large stone homes built by the Ellicott brothers were also destroyed in Baltimore County during Agnes. A third home, built by George Ellicott, was moved across Frederick Road 15 years later to higher ground. (Everyone who gathered to witness collectively held their breath as the home was moved on wheels across the road.)

Since that time, climate change is becoming more obvious in our area.

The first top-down flooding occurred in Howard County in 2011. The storm sent a flood of water down Main Street, starting beyond the West End of Old Ellicott City. Then 2016 flooded the town again, and another storm in 2018 caused a third death. However, these storms flooded *not only* Howard County but also Baltimore County. The Patapsco River and all these tributaries converge at the bridge and flow into Baltimore County. In fact, according to USGS StreamStat data, Oella sits at the bottom of a drainage basin funnel of nearly 300 square miles! Areas contributing floodwater in that basin are from other communities in Baltimore County, Howard & Carroll Counties, and Baltimore City.

There is also Cooper Branch in Baltimore County, that runs along our Trolley Trail #9 that floods Oella. Baltimore County recognized that flooding occurred along that branch and mitigated an area near Oella Avenue in 2019. It flooded again in 2020, sending a river of water down Westchester Avenue in Baltimore County, to the Wilkins-Rogers Flour Mill property.

(We did not realize that the FEMA floodplain map was in the process of being updated until 2023, but the most significant change was the mill *building* was taken out of the floodplain, leaving the remainder of the property in the floodplain.)

The mill was operational until 2020, and when it closed Baltimore County changed the zoning to multi-use. In 2022 Baltimore County approved a redevelopment plan for the mill property: 190 luxury apartments, retail, and a destination restaurant were approved. Waivers for the forest buffer and open space were granted. 4 additional floors were also approved to be added to the already 190,000 sq ft building. Trees will be removed along the First National Historic Road — Frederick Road — to accommodate widening the road.

Meanwhile, in Howard County, the *Safe and Sound* plan moves forward. Shops have been demolished on Lower Main Street, retention ponds have been built and the ambitious 18', mile-long Extended North Tunnel is under construction — with the outfall directly across the river from Oella, *upriver* from the Patapsco River bridge and the mill property under redevelopment.

There has been admissions from leaders that counties do not coordinate, or even share, plans for development in our watersheds. We are hopeful that this Bill can identify our Patapsco watershed as a interjurisdictional flood hazard watershed for certain planning purposes and keep our residents safe from flood events.

Thank you.