

Wednesday February 25, 2026

TO: Marc Korman, Chair House Environment and Transportation Committee, and Committee Members

FROM: Humna Sharif, The Nature Conservancy, Climate Adaptation Manager; Cait Kerr, The Nature Conservancy, State Policy Manager

POSITION: Support HB 779 Natural Resources - Riverine Siting and Design Criteria – Requirements.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports HB 779 Natural Resources - Riverine Siting and Design Criteria – Requirements sponsored by Delegate Lehman. TNC’s mission is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. We work in more than 70 countries and all 50 states in the United States. With the support of more than one million members globally, TNC has been working to conserve, protect, and restore ecosystems and species for nearly 75 years around the world. In Maryland, our work focuses on delivering solutions that secure clean water, air, and healthy, resilient living environments.

HB 779 expands Maryland flood resilience law to be inclusive of nuisance and riverine flooding, in addition to sea level rise inundation and coastal flooding. HB 779 requires state and local projects for which 50% of project costs are funded with State funds to follow updated riverine siting and design criteria as determined by the Maryland Coast Smart Council (the Council). This bill also instructs the Council to develop and implement updated riverine siting and design criteria, requiring new state and local capital projects and reconstruction projects to be built to withstand the impacts of a 500-year flood event. The updated design criteria are to be established in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Department of the Environment (MDE), and the Department of Transportation (MDOT).

Commonly used indicators of flood risk include a 100-year floodplain or a Special Flood Hazard Area, and 500-year floodplain or a Moderate Flood Hazard Area. These measures translate to a 1% and 0.2% chance of flooding in a given year, respectively. HB 779 takes a forward-looking approach, and recognizes that incorporating the 500-year floodplain, as opposed to the more commonly used 100-year floodplain, in design criteria requirements for state funded projects can help Maryland build long term floodplain resilience.

HB 779 is a timely and much needed piece of legislation as climate change induced flooding continues to worsen across coastal and inland areas in Maryland. Last year, Western Maryland communities experienced devastating flooding in Allegheny and Garrett Counties.¹ On the other

¹ Tbrown, & Tbrown. (2025, May 16). Governor Moore declares state of emergency in response to historic flooding in western Maryland - MDEM newsroom. MDEM Newsroom. <https://news.maryland.gov/mdem/2025/05/16/governor-moore-declares-state-of-emergency-in-response-to-historic-flooding-in-western-maryland/>

side of Maryland, our vibrant coastline is experiencing increased sunny day flooding from sea level rise. According to one estimate, it will cost the state \$27.4 billion to safeguard businesses, homes, roads, and entire communities in Maryland from chronic flooding by 2040 under a moderate sea-level-rise scenario.²

Maryland is not alone in experiencing increased flood risk, as nearly every county in the country has experienced rapidly rising flood risk in the last few decades.³ In 2025, several states, including Texas, New Mexico, Illinois and North Carolina experienced devastating floods that were caused by extremely heavy rainfall inland. These rainfall events resulted in overflowing riverbanks and impacting communities residing within riverine floodplains. The tragic loss of more than 130 lives⁴ in the Guadalupe River flooding in Texas last year is a reminder that we need to carefully review and update floodplain development criteria at the state level to keep communities safe.

Building resilience to climate change is among the biggest challenges of our time, and many aspects of our governance system must come together to tackle this crisis. The Nature Conservancy commends Delegate Lehman in offering a forward-looking approach to siting and design criteria in HB 779 that can ensure that damage to new and reconstructed buildings from future flood events in our state is reduced. **Therefore, we urge a favorable report on HB 779.**

² Center for Climate Integrity, Resilient Analytics, & University of Colorado. (2020). Climate costs in 2040: Maryland [Report]. <https://www.climatecosts2040.org/files/state/MD.pdf>

³ Fathom. (2026, February 18). US Flood Risk Index – Actionable Insights by state. <https://www.fathom.global/us-flood-risk-index/>

⁴ Editor, N. (2025, July 15). *The cost of inaction: What the Texas floods reveal about our risk*. Association of State Floodplain Managers | ASFPM’s mission is to promote education, policies and activities that mitigate current and future losses, costs and human suffering caused by flooding. <https://www.floods.org/news-views/flood-mitigation/the-cost-of-inaction-what-the-texas-floods-reveal-about-our-risk/>