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Appropriations Committee

Subcommittees

Oversight Committee on Pensions

Transportation and the Environment



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
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**Youth Camps – Structure in Flood Hazard Areas (HB1041) 2026**

**Testimony of Delegate Ryan Spiegel – Favorable**

Hon. Chair Bagnall, Vice Chair Cullison, and Members of the Health Committee:

In the early morning of July 4, 2025, a powerful storm caused the Guadalupe River to jump its banks at Camp Mystic in Texas. Flash floods breached cabins. Counselors and staff risked their lives navigating rapidly rising flood waters to try to bring their campers to safety but, heartbreakingly, 25 young campers and two counselors who were trapped in their sleeping cabins lost their lives. I send my children to sleepaway camps every summer, and I was utterly shaken by the horrific disaster at Camp Mystic.

Perhaps this catastrophe could have been prevented. Reporting revealed that evacuations did not begin until long after the flash flood warning had been issued. It also came to light that cellular alerts of the flash flood were never received. Maybe the buildings that were inundated should not have been so close to a potentially dangerous river in the first place. Several camp structures were located within the 100-year flood event zone. Federal authorities and camp officials understood that many buildings were susceptible to life-threatening floods long before the 2025 tragedy occurred.

Maryland is no stranger to devastating floods, from Westernport to Ellicott City, from Annapolis to the Eastern Shore. And if some good can come out of the Texas tragedy, to help prevent it from happening elsewhere and help save the lives of our children, then we must act.

HB 1041 prohibits the Maryland Department of Health—which is the state agency that regulates, inspects, and licenses camps—from granting or renewing operating permits or accepting outside accreditations for camps if camper sleeping structures are located within a 100-year flood zone. This will ensure that campers and counselors are housed in safe areas beyond the reach of potentially life-threatening floods.

The bill is also reasonably limited to exclude day camps and certain other camping facilities; it applies to only those structures that are sleeping quarters in longer term overnight camps regulated by MDH. And the fiscal note is basically zero.

The tragedy in Texas was profound, shocking, and a parent's worst nightmare. To honor the memories of those who simply wanted to have fun at camp, keep our children

safe, and make sure a disaster of this nature never happens in Maryland, I respectfully request a favorable report. Thank you.