

Congressman Van Drew

House CJS Appropriations Subcommittee Testimony

- Good Afternoon Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Meng. It is a pleasure to once again testify before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice and Science.
- First, I want to briefly speak on my Community Project Funding requests below, then move on to a much more serious matter.

#5563 – Vineland Mobile Command Vehicle - \$1,665,962

#5758 - Great Egg Harbor River Watershed Revitalization - \$4,500,000

- My first Community Project request is from the Department of Justice Byrne Justice Grants account, to purchase a Mobile Command Vehicle for the City of Vineland.
- The City's current vehicle is 35-years old and has reached the end of its useful life. This vehicle is important for the city's response to emergencies, including mass casualties, as well as managing large events. This capability is shared with other towns throughout the region and is broadly supported by law enforcement and emergency response organizations.
- The Committee funded several similar projects last year, and I have provided the project and reference number at the end of my testimony for your consideration.

- My second Community Project request is for the Great Egg Harbor River Watershed Revitalization, from the Coastal Zone Management Account.
- The Great Egg Harbor is one of only a few national wild and scenic rivers, and I have worked closely with the New Jersey Department of Transportation for years to prepare this submission.
- This will give the NJDOT the resources to execute on its shovel-ready plans to beneficially use dredged material for ecosystem and shoreline restoration. It has outstanding levels of support from a dozen different government, business, environmental, and recreational groups.
- I ask the committee to please consider funding this item at the full requested amount. This is the level of resources it takes to execute a project of this nature and scale.

- Finally, I must ask for the Committee's help with the critical situation in New Jersey caused by a total failure of government at all levels.
- This is an existential threat to the largest fisheries in the country, and we need to act.
- Through the COVID-era CARES Act, and the Fiscal Year 2021 Omnibus, Congress appropriated funds to NOAA to provide financial assistance for struggling fisheries.
- These funds were passed through regional fisheries commissions, in our case the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.
- The Commissions passed the money to state agencies, such as the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP).

- NJDEP disbursed millions of dollars to fisheries across the state. They calculated the loss relative to normal revenue and paid the balance.
- Fisheries were explicitly told that they would not have to return this money except in the case of fraud.
- Years later, in response to a report from the state comptroller, NJDEP went back to the fisheries and said they had to redo their revenue calculations to cover a broader window of time.
- This action resulted in dozens of fisheries now being declared “more than whole.” The consequences of this have been extremely destabilizing.

- The situation is one of the worst I've ever seen. NOAA is demanding ASFMC repay the money, but ASFMC has no money or authority to do so. Other Commissions are now hesitant to ever work with the federal government again.
- NJDEP is inflicting brutal enforcement actions upon NJ fisheries for simply having followed the guidance that they were given.
- As of February, there were still \$3,054,784 in claw backs outstanding, affecting 20 different fisheries.
- For several fisheries they are trying to claw back over \$500,000 each. For others, they are trying to claw back funds from the family members of the now-deceased that took the aid during COVID.

- The situation is alarming. The entire point of this program was to save the fisheries, and now it is going to destroy them. Congress must do something about this.
- My immediate concern is making New Jersey fisheries whole. I ask that the Committee include an appropriation to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission so they may repay their debt to NOAA.
- I have been told that if ASFMC pays NOAA, then the collections process will stop, and the fisheries will be safe. This action is commensurate with the seriousness of the situation.
- Thank you for your consideration.