



**RISE TO
RESILIENCE**

The Honorable Jared Huffman, Chair
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
Committee on Natural Resources
1332 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Cliff Bentz, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
Committee on Natural Resources
1329 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

**Submitted Testimony
For the Record**

**Statement of Karen Imas, Vice President of Programs, Waterfront Alliance
Before the House Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
Regarding H.R. 4677, the New York-New Jersey Watershed Protection Act**

January 25, 2022

Thank you, Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Bentz, and members of the Subcommittee, for the opportunity to present this testimony regarding H.R. 4677.

Waterfront Alliance is a New York-New Jersey regional organization focused on resilient, revitalized, and accessible coastlines for all communities. We spearhead the Rise to Resilience campaign and coalition which includes more than 100 organizations representing leaders in business, labor, environmental justice, volunteer organizations, scientists, environmental advocates, and design professionals collectively calling on our federal, state, and local governments to make building climate resilience an urgent priority.

The future of our communities, jobs, safety, health, infrastructure, and wildlife and natural habitats are at risk from flooding and other impacts associated with climate change. Waterfront Alliance and the Rise to Resilience coalition support the call for bold, inclusive, community- and evidence-based action from policymakers at every level of government and we support passage of the New York-New Jersey Watershed Protection Act.

Recent storms like Hurricane Ida have tragically showed us yet again of our vulnerability to crisis. We are reminded how disasters like these have too often been borne unequally by those with the fewest resources. This bill would ensure that restoration efforts utilize science-based principles to mitigate flood risks, and deliver funds to environmental justice communities, as well as develop public access, outreach and educational activities.

Flood risk in the New York-New Jersey metro region is severe and funding to mitigate flood risks is essential. The number of individuals living in the flood plain in New City is more than one-million and in New Jersey



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Hundreds of thousands of residents live in flood zones that can become inundated with storm water. In New York State, 90 percent of the population resides in a waterfront community.¹

The social and economic costs of weather-related disasters are sobering. As an example, Westchester County alone has had eight federally declared disasters in the last 10 years. Every New Jersey citizen lives in a county that was affected by at least one federally-declared weather disaster since 2010 and weather disaster events have cost New Jersey more than \$47b since 2012².

The \$50 million a year in federal funds authorized through this bill would be a meaningful investment to protect and restore the Hudson-Raritan watersheds and support climate resilience for the watersheds. Federal funding is needed to implement existing science-based plans within the watersheds that flow into New York-New Jersey Harbor, including the Hudson, Mohawk, Raritan, Passaic, Hackensack, and Bronx rivers.

We commend that environmental justice is an explicitly stated goal of the bill, highlighting the need for the program to improve human access to green spaces, and guide the grant selection process to include frontline community voices. Environmental justice provisions, including the progressive 75% federal cost share that includes in-kind contributions such as staff time for projects, are an important part of the legislation as we have seen that a 1:1 match has been difficult for environmental justice and small organizations.

Additionally, we believe this bill can support capacity building grants for environmental justice groups and small organizations, as well as municipalities, to build systems and capacity for applying for, administering, and succeeding with grants from this program and others.

Federal collaboration and cooperation across local government and state boundaries will be needed to implement the holistic, watershed wide conservation and resilience strategy that our region needs. New York City, for example, is rolling out a five-borough climate adaptation plan (Local Law 122) which includes provisions for neighborhood adaptation planning in environmental justice communities.³ This program would benefit from a federal infusion of funds to ensure a robust planning process.

Similarly, municipal land use planning in New Jersey, now requires municipalities to assess the effects of climate change on their towns in their master plan.⁴ The new law requires that the land use plan element of a

¹ Rebuild by Design: <http://www.rebuildbydesign.org/our-work/new-york-state-infrastructure/nys-disaster-declaration-frequency-map>

² NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI) U.S. Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters (2022). <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/>

³ Mayor's Office of Climate Resiliency: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/orr/roadmap/adaptation-roadmap.page>

⁴ <https://njclimateresourcecenter.rutgers.edu/for-builders-towns-assessing-impact-on-climate-change-is-now-law/#:~:text=Phil%20Murphy%20signed%20legislation%20that,change%2Drelated%20hazard%20vulnerability%20assessment>



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municipal master plan include a climate change-related hazard vulnerability assessment and that the State Department of Environmental Protection provide technical assistance upon request.

The Rise to Resilience coalition thanks Congress Member Tonko for his leadership, as well as all of the bill co-sponsors. We look forward to helping with the passage of this legislation. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

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