

Testimony of Representative Mondaire Jones of New York

U.S. House of Representatives Transportation & Infrastructure Committee Water Resources Development Act of 2022 Member Day Hearing

March 16, 2022

Thank you, Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, and members of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee for the opportunity to express my strong support for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers projects and policy in the Water Resources Development Act of 2022 that will help protect the lives and livelihoods of Rockland and Westchester County residents.

Last summer, communities in my district were devastated by Hurricane Ida. Six Westchester County residents tragically lost their lives and countless homes and businesses were destroyed by flooding. In fact, the flooding was so severe that outdated models considered Hurricane Ida a once-every-300-years event. But anyone paying attention knows that extreme weather events like Hurricane Ida are not happening once every 300 years. These disasters are happening year after year.

Rye Brook residents Ken and Fran Bailie were two of my constituents killed by Hurricane Ida. They were on their way home from Iona College, where they worked as brilliant and committed computer science professors, when their car was overwhelmed by rushing water that overflowed from the Blind Brook.

The Blind Brook is a consistent source of flooding during heavy rain events—regularly filling basements in the many homes, businesses, community centers, and schools that sit in the floodplain. In 2019, municipalities affected by the flooding requested that the Army Corps conduct a watershed study of the area. The Army Corps has completed all preliminary work, but the feasibility study has not yet begun.

As the committee begins consideration of the Water Resources Development Act of 2022, I request that you include language directing the Army Corps to expedite this project before flooding from the Blind Brook claims any more lives in our community.

Additionally, I am requesting the scope of the study be expanded to address the frequency and severity of weather events caused by climate change. Currently, the Army Corps is authorized to study the Blind Brook's 100-year floodplain. This scope is insufficient to understand the full impact of storms like Hurricane Ida. The scope of the Blind Brook Watershed Study must be

expanded to understand the impacts of future storms in the full Hurricane Ida-affected floodplain. Without this change, any analysis conducted by the Army Corps will be incomplete.

I am also calling on the committee to include a policy change in the 2022 Water Resources Development Act that will allow the Army Corps to more comprehensively study the effects of climate change on watersheds. I am requesting the scope of Watershed Studies be expanded to include sea level rise, coastal storm damage reduction, and erosion and shore protection so that the impact of sea level rise and coastal hazards can be adequately considered in relevant Watershed Studies.

The Hudson River is a scenic, ecologically rich centerpiece of economic and recreational life in many Rockland and Westchester County communities. But the effects of climate change also mean that our rivertowns can expect increased flooding, watershed damage, and erosion in the coming years. These communities are in need of significant resources for resiliency and flood mitigation – needs that can be better understood and addressed with the assistance of the U.S. Army Corps.

Expanding the scope of watershed studies to include sea level rise and coastal hazards will help communities along the Hudson River and communities along tidal rivers across the country address the realities of the climate crisis.

I thank the committee for its efforts to understand Member priorities in this process and its consideration of these requests, along with the others I have submitted, for inclusion in the 2022 Water Resources Development Act.