

Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen: thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Illinois' 15th District.

On behalf of my constituents, I would like to highlight the importance of Mississippi levee drainage districts like Sny Island, based near Quincy, Illinois. The levees along the Mississippi River protect critical road and rail infrastructure, thousands of acres of farmland, and countless homes and businesses from routine flooding. They are essential to the economy of western Illinois, as well as the economies of nine other states along the Mississippi River.

Levee drainage districts like the Sny face significant challenges to their operations, including record high diesel prices and shortages of skilled engineering workers. In recent years, the Sny has also faced heightened regulatory headwinds under the US Army Corps of Engineering's Section 408 regulations. Levee drainage district operators frequently face permitting delays or even denials for routine maintenance and improvements to their levee systems, leading to increased flood risk for local communities.

The current interpretation of Section 408 has the potential for significant negative impact on the ability of levee drainage districts like Sny Island to maintain their FEMA 100-year flood accreditation. Local levee sponsors, which presently fall under the purported jurisdiction of Section 408, face federal permitting denials when seeking to increase levee height to maintain their 100-year flood protection. Loss of accreditation on FEMA flood maps reduces land value by as much as half, with significant negative consequences to agriculture and the local tax base.

I ask that the Committee consider clarifying the jurisdiction that the US Army Corps of Engineering has over local levee sponsors. The Committee has an opportunity during WRDA 2024 to prohibit the retroactive application of Section 408 to levee systems modified prior to the first issuance of the regulation in 2006. I urge the Committee to affirm Congressional intent and fix the misapplication of Section 408. This will protect the ability of levee drainage districts like Sny Island to operate long into the future.

Again, I thank you for your consideration and the chance to speak to the Committee today. As a member of the Agriculture Committee, I look forward to working with the Transportation Committee to address this issue, which is critically important to Illinois, and every other state with river flood protection systems. Thank you.