

**STATEMENT OF SENATOR CHRIS VAN HOLLEN  
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS**

**“THE RESPONSE TO THE FRANCIS SCOTT KEY BRIDGE COLLAPSE  
ON MARCH 26, 2024”**

**JULY 10, 2024**

Thank you Chairman Carper and Ranking Member Capito for the opportunity to testify about this emergency measure. And thank you Senator Cardin for being the captain of federal Team Maryland and bringing us together on a bipartisan basis to address tragedy of the collapse of the Key Bridge.

Every member of our congressional delegation is united behind the legislation we have introduced — **the Baltimore Bridge Response Invests and Delivers Global Economic Relief Act, or the Baltimore BRIDGE Relief Act.**

For 47 years, the Key Bridge has been an iconic and indelible part of the Baltimore City skyline and a vital transportation artery that is essential to the economic health of the region. More than 34,000 travelers crossed it daily.

It was the gateway to the Port of Baltimore, which welcomes 1,800 ships every year and supports 20,000 direct jobs—including 2,400 union longshoremen—24,000 induced jobs from local purchases, and 7,200 indirect jobs.

The Port generates \$70 billion of economic revenue for the City. It is the busiest port in the nation for automobiles, light trucks, farm and construction machinery, imported forest products, aluminum, and sugar.

The bridge’s collapse was a tragedy that shook the world.

First and foremost, it was a human tragedy for the six Baltimore workers who were working the overnight shift. They were immigrants from Honduras, El Salvador, Mexico and Guatemala, each had loved ones who depended on them. Four were fathers.

The debris from the collapsed bridge also cut off access to the Port of Baltimore, temporarily putting 8,000 people out of work and halting the flow of trade that affects millions across the country.

The collapse has also deprived the Baltimore region of an essential transportation link, disrupting the daily lives of tens of thousands — which is creating huge traffic bottlenecks.

But as the bridge came apart, we came together.

We are incredibly grateful to the first responders who immediately jumped into action, including a Maryland Transportation Authority (MDTA) officer on site who quickly stopped traffic from going on the bridge preventing further tragic loss of life. That officer and all of the first responders on scene that morning deserve our thanks and gratitude.

Meanwhile, President Biden went straight to work, reaching out personally to me, and Senator Cardin, Governor Moore, and our state and local partners.

Secretary Buttigieg and other federal officers and agencies got moving. Partner agencies established the Unified Command – led by the Coast Guard – to manage the scene and begin the recovery effort.

The Unified Command recovered the bodies of the six workers, and later deployed precision explosives to remove a large section of the bridge from on top of the *Dali*. On May 20<sup>th</sup>, the ship was finally floated away from the site. On June 12<sup>th</sup>, the Port of Baltimore was fully re-opened.

In particular, I'd like to thank Colonel Estee Pinchasin and her team at the Army Corps of Engineers for their amazing work. Senator Carper, I know you saw the Colonel on your visit to Baltimore. But her vision and focus on the mission merits a special shout out before her three-year rotation as commander ends.

When we all spoke about our hopes to reopen the Port of Baltimore, the Colonel told us, “It is not a hope — it’s a plan.”

Colonel Pinchasin and Unified Command have done their part, quickly reopening the Port of Baltimore. Now, we need to do our part to rebuild and reopen the bridge.

This will require significant planning and financial investment. The Maryland Department of Transportation estimates the cost at between \$1.7 and \$1.9 billion. The collapse was a national tragedy, and the scale of it will require a sustained, national solution.

That’s why Maryland immediately worked – and succeeded – in getting the bridge replacement project enrolled in the Federal Highway Administration’s Emergency Relief Program for Disaster-Damaged Highways and Bridges. I’m especially grateful to Maryland Secretary of Transportation Paul Wiedefeld and his team for all their efforts.

As you know, that guarantees that the federal government will fund 90% of the replacement efforts.

Following those efforts, along with the rest of Team Maryland, I joined Senator Cardin in introducing the bipartisan Baltimore BRIDGE Relief Act to ensure 100% federal funding for the bridge replacement – making good on the President’s promise in the early days of this tragedy – and mirroring the actions of the federal government in other similar disasters around the country.

**Importantly, the bill makes crystal clear that the federal government will receive “any compensation for damages or insurance proceeds, including interest, recovered by a State,**

**a political subdivision of a State, or a toll authority for repair, including reconstruction, of the bridge.”**

The President reiterated his commitment to full federal funding for the bridge when he released a new emergency supplemental proposal in June. His proposal not only honors the commitment that the federal government will cover the full cost of rebuilding the Key Bridge – it also critically would provide the funding Maryland and other states need to address this and other disasters – from the fires that hit Maui, to flooding in Florida, to severe storms in the Midwest.

That’s why I’m urging my colleagues to take up the disaster supplemental to uphold our commitments and to replenish these vital funds for Maryland and for the many other states who rely on them and encourage this Committee to approve the provision to increase the federal cost share from 90% to 100% for this project.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Capito for this opportunity.