

Senator Benjamin L. Cardin (D-Md.)
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Committee on Environment and Public Works
**Senate EPW Committee Information-Gathering Process Entitled, “An Information-
Gathering Process on Draft Legislation Entitled, AWIA 2020 & The Drinking Water
Infrastructure Act of 2020: Stakeholder Comments”**
Wednesday, April 22, 2020

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to welcome the public to participate in this week’s information gathering session on the current draft of this year’s Water Resources Development Act (WRDA).

WRDA is important legislation for the State of Maryland and the health of our economy and our environment. For example, the Port of Baltimore plays a key role in the economic competitiveness of Maryland and the country. The Chesapeake Bay is a national treasure whose ecosystems and landscapes are central to the identity and livelihood of our State, but it continues to face serious challenges from environmental degradation and climate change that must be addressed. I am pleased that the draft America’s Water Infrastructure Act of 2020 that is now available for comment takes steps to address many of these concerns.

In recent times, Congress has successfully passed Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) reauthorization legislation on a bipartisan basis every two years. This year, we have the added challenge of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, requiring us to collaborate at a distance. To Chairman Barrasso, Ranking Member Carper, and my colleagues on the Committee, I thank you for your work on this legislation under these unusual and difficult circumstances.

Marylanders have witnessed the dangerous consequences of extreme weather and we know preparation is one of the best ways to mitigate future disasters. We all need clean, safe water during good times and emergencies. As a country, we must better prepare our water systems for the increasing instances of more frequent and severe floods, record-setting rainfall, wildfires and other natural disasters ahead, as well as slow-onset events such as sea-level rise. This bipartisan legislation takes important steps toward shoring up America’s aging water infrastructure against the costly threat of climate change.

The draft includes important provisions for Maryland, such as authorizing the construction of the Anacostia Watershed Restoration project in Prince George’s County. It also takes steps to expand opportunities to use natural infrastructure and the beneficial use of dredged material, so that sediment dredged to maintain our navigation channels will not always end up as a waste product, but can help restore ecosystems and rebuild wetlands—an idea that has been put into practice successfully on Poplar Island in the Chesapeake Bay.

The discussion draft includes an authorization of \$5,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2021-2024 to create a federal program administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to help communities strengthen the resiliency of their publicly owned treatment works against the threats of natural hazards.

The Drinking Water Infrastructure Act of 2020 discussion draft reauthorizes and expands the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Drinking Water Infrastructure Resilience and Sustainability program at \$10,000,000 total for each of fiscal years 2021-2024. Grants will be awarded on a competitive basis for activities to increase resiliency or sustainability such as water conservation, water use efficiency, watershed protection, and modification or relocation.

When precipitation falls on roads, streets, roofs and sidewalks, it can push harmful pollutants like fertilizer, pet waste, chemicals and litter into the nearest waterway. This bill also takes innovative actions to improve the availability of public and private sources of funding for the construction, rehabilitation, operation and maintenance of stormwater infrastructure to meet the requirements of the Clean Water Act.

Urban and suburban stormwater runoff is one of the only major sources of water pollution that is growing in the Chesapeake Bay and across much of the country. Communities with stormwater permits include more than 80 percent of the U.S. population—therefore, stormwater funding is a national problem that requires action.

To all of the stakeholders reviewing the legislation and providing us with your thoughtful input, I appreciate you taking the time to share your views with us. Your perspectives and comments are important to this process and have the potential to strengthen and improve upon the current draft we have posted this week.

To all of you, I hope that you have been staying healthy and safe as you take care for yourselves and for others during this challenging time. I look forward to our ongoing communication and collaboration on this important legislation.

Thank you.