

Testimony
Congressman Josh Gottheimer (NJ-5)
House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment
Proposals for a Water Resources Development Act of 2022
Members' Day Hearing – March 16, 2022

Thank you, Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, Subcommittee Chairwoman Napolitano, Subcommittee Ranking Member Rouzer, and to the members of the Committee, I greatly appreciate you hosting this important hearing and for having us here today. I appreciate you seeking input as you prepare a new Water Resources Development Act, and I am here today to advocate for several water resources and water infrastructure priorities important for North Jersey. I have submitted five requests to the Committee, and I'm hopeful they will be included in the final WRDA we enact this year.

My requests include the following.

First, to create an authority for the Army Corps of Engineers to be able to perform the design and construction of necessary remediation of hazardous, toxic, and radioactive waste contamination on projects as part of the construction of a project. The cost will remain a non-federal sponsor's responsibility and the federal government will not bear responsibility for liability in the clean-up of any hazardous, toxic, and radioactive waste necessary for the construction of a project.

We must take steps to protect our water, air, and our open spaces for our children and grandchildren — pragmatic, commonsense action in our fight for the future of our communities and our planet.

Second, to create an authority that will allow reimbursement to homeowners for the costs of relocation and required upgrades as part of non-structural measures. Under current practice, if a project recommends elevation of a home, the homeowner is responsible for any relocation costs. My proposal would allow reimbursement to homeowners for those costs. It could also allow the costs of required upgrades to be reimbursed to homeowners as part of the non-structural measures — such as required sewer upgrades or other required measures.

Just look at Hurricane Ida and what it did in my state — flooding homes and, sadly, taking many, many lives. Every time we have another bad storm, it is costing insurers, taxpayers, and families a fortune.

Third, along with Representative Tonko and as a cosponsor, I have submitted the text of the New York-New Jersey Watershed Protection Act to the Committee. This bill would include the adoption of a watershed-wide restoration strategy in consultation with the Corps of Engineers to coordinate, fund, and provide technical assistance for conservation and restoration activities that strengthen flood controls, restore outdated dams, improve water quality, and increase public access to these vital water resources.

The New York-New Jersey Watershed is home to more than 20 million people, more than 200 fish species, and some of the most endangered rivers in the U.S., due to high levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs).

Fourth, along with Representative Pascrell office, I have submitted a request for the Corps of Engineers to partner with several North Jersey municipalities – including the Borough of Lodi, Township of Saddle Brook, Township of Rochelle Park, the Borough of Maywood, the City of Garfield, the Township of South Hackensack, and the Borough of Wallington – to conduct a feasibility study regarding flood control.

According to these local communities, flooding from Hurricane Ida caused significant damage, resulting in evacuations of hundreds of residents — with many still in temporary housing. We desperately need the federal government to step in and help residents, families, and local governments mitigate the problem before more disasters occur.

Finally, I submitted a policy request to the Committee granting the Corps of Engineers authority to study and address the impact of sea level rise on projects. Currently, sea level rise is only studied when its impacts are incorporated into coastal storm risk features that are authorized for construction. Sea level rise by itself is not examined if it is not related to a storm risk feature being authorized. This is problematic because an area where no coastal storm risk features are recommended may in fact be impacted by sea level rise in the future, but the Corps does not include that without a specifically recommended project feature.

We are in the middle of a major climate crisis. Just look at the last few years — the unprecedented wildfires, record high temperatures, shorter winters, and rising water levels off the Jersey shore.

For New Jersey and for our whole planet, we must take action that will help us tackle climate change now and not later, so that our country and state will have clean air and water for future generations.

In addition to these priorities, I'd be remiss if I didn't highlight the critical water investments made in our historic Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill last November, now being implemented across the country.

Back home in New Jersey, we have 350,000 lead service lines, according to the American Water Works Association. That's a lead pipe that connects a water main to premises like a home or school.

Overall, nationwide, our Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill will make a \$55 billion investment in clean drinking water — which represents the largest investment in American history.

New Jersey will expect to claw back \$1 billion over five years from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill — to improve water infrastructure across our state and to ensure that clean, safe drinking water is a right for our kids and families.

Investment will go toward the replacement of lead service lines, and toward emergencies involving lead in drinking water, assistance for small communities, like those in Sussex and Warren Counties and across North Jersey, and of course, help for schools across the Fifth Congressional District.

I've been helping lead the fight to make sure investment from the infrastructure bill goes to projects in North Jersey, including water infrastructure improvements in Fair Lawn, and flood mitigation in Hillsdale, New Milford, and Westwood.

Making the investment we need to deliver clean drinking water to every American is a bipartisan issue that can bring everyone together.

Thank you for holding this important hearing, and allowing me to discuss these critically important projects and issues facing our families, small businesses, and communities. I am confident that if we work together we can mitigate flooding, combat climate change, and ensure we have clean water for our communities. I look forward to continuing to work with you on these important issues.