

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

August 4, 2022

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

As Members of Congress representing the Hampton Roads region of Virginia, we write to request your assistance in enhancing the region's climate resilience through improved interagency coordination. We appreciate your ongoing commitment, in partnership with our allies, to the rapid decarbonization necessary to avoid the worst of the climate crisis. We also appreciate your work to make the United States more resilient through the passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, your support for interagency emergency response efforts, the development agency adaptation plans, and your support for increased funding for pre-disaster mitigation, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers civil works projects. The Department of Defense recognizes that, as the climate changes, "leveraging knowledge and actions when planning climate change adaptation and emergency preparedness and response requires expanded collaboration with surrounding communities."¹ This is especially true in Hampton Roads due to the significant federal footprint and the region's geographic complexities. We therefore urge the appointment of an Interagency Coordinator for Regional Resilience to foster the necessary collaboration to adapt and prepare for chronic and acute hazards that could otherwise jeopardize national security.

Earlier this month, the House of Representatives passed the National Defense Authorization Act with numerous climate provisions including a bipartisan amendment to enhance resilience in defense communities. We hope the Senate will take swift action to send the bill, with this amendment, to your desk. Given the urgent need to enhance resilience in Hampton Roads, however, we urge you not to wait for legislative action and to appoint a regional resilience coordinator for the region through executive action.

With support from the Department of Defense and regional partners, the communities within Hampton Roads have already undertaken significant adaptation planning efforts and met significant non-federal matches to design and construct projects which protect important military

¹ Department of Defense, Office of the Undersecretary of Defense (Acquisition and Sustainment), *Department of Defense Draft Climate Adaptation Plan. Report Submitted to National Climate Task Force and Federal Chief Sustainability Officer* (2021). <https://www.sustainability.gov/pdfs/dod-2021-cap.pdf>

installations. The region also has multiple Joint Land Use Studies (JLUSs) with clear recommendations that are ripe for implementation.² Even prior to the completion of these studies, the Obama-Biden administration worked to facilitate intergovernmental planning efforts that included DOD partners. The Hampton Roads Sea Level Rise Preparedness and Resilience Intergovernmental Pilot Project (“the Pilot Project”) was launched in 2014 as a pilot project under the White House and the Department of Defense.³ There were five such projects and one of the Pilot Project’s aims was to model a whole of government approach to resilience planning. The appointment of an interagency coordinator would support implementation of the JLUSs and other local and regional efforts, enhancing military readiness and regional resilience which, as the DOD recognizes, are inextricably connected.⁴

Hampton Roads is home to a diverse and growing population; numerous federal facilities, including 15 military installations; one of the busiest ports on the east coast; and a unique coastal ecosystem. Located at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay, the region is on the front lines of sea level rise, with the fastest rate of relative sea level rise on the east coast, in part due to land subsidence in the region.⁵ The waterways that characterize the region also present unique transportation challenges that make planning for emergency evacuations and disaster recovery particularly challenging. Though the region has largely been spared by severe hurricanes in recent years, the threat of such storms, in addition to recurrent flooding, is clear and growing. Municipalities, academics, industry, and communities throughout Hampton Roads continue to rise to this challenge, developing expertise and solutions applicable in the region and beyond. Old Dominion University convened stakeholders, including the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission (HRPDC) and DOD partners to develop a “whole of government” and “whole of community” approach as part of the Pilot Project. Experts in resilience and flooding, led by the HRPDC, contributed to JLUSs for Portsmouth and Chesapeake as well as Norfolk and Virginia Beach.

² City of Hampton, *Hampton-Langley Air Force Base Joint Land Use Study Addendum: Resiliency and Adaptation* (2018). <https://hampton.gov/DocumentCenter/View/23346/Hampton-Langley-JLUS-Addendum>.

Hampton Roads Planning District Commission, *Norfolk and Virginia Beach Joint Land Use Study: Final* (2019). <https://www.hrpdcva.gov/uploads/docs/FINALNoVBJLUSReport.pdf>.

Hampton Roads Planning District Commission, *Portsmouth & Chesapeake Joint Land Use Study: Final Report* (2021). <https://www.hrpdcva.gov/library/view/1815/final-portsmouth-and-chesapeake-jlus-report>.

³ Steinhilber, Emily E.; Boswell, Maura; Considine, Carol; and Mast, Larry, *Hampton Roads Sea Level Rise Preparedness and Resilience Intergovernmental Pilot Project. Phase 2 Report: Recommendations, Accomplishments and Lessons Learned* (2016). https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/hripp_reports/2

⁴ Department of Defense, Office of the Undersecretary of Defense (Acquisition and Sustainment), *Department of Defense Draft Climate Adaptation Plan. Report Submitted to National Climate Task Force and Federal Chief Sustainability Officer* (2021). <https://www.sustainability.gov/pdfs/dod-2021-cap.pdf>

⁵ Virginia Institute of Marine Science, U.S. East Coast Sea Level: Annual Values & Processes (2021). https://www.vims.edu/research/products/slrc/compare/east_coast/index.php

Most of the resilience work in Hampton Roads to date has been led by local governments. However, given the federal government's large footprint in Hampton Roads, there is a need for federal agencies to play a more active role in the region's ongoing efforts. The creation of a coordinator position to facilitate interagency planning and implementation between the Department of Defense, Department of the Interior, Department of Veterans Affairs, the National Aeronautics and Space Agency, and other agencies would complement the local and regional efforts already underway. Such an approach would help the whole region proactively address the growing threat of climate change and, in doing so, prevent needless suffering, impairment of military readiness, property damage, and loss of life.⁶

Since the Pilot Project's final report was released in 2016, much progress has been made in implementing recommendations for which a single entity was found responsible. Recommendations requiring collaboration between entities, including various government entities, however, have proven more challenging. This challenge, along with the need to act quickly on the recommendations of the JLUSs, underscores the need for enhanced regional and interagency coordination, as well as additional funding to support planning, design, and implementation of projects. This is especially true for objectives that require coordination between federal entities and local governments. Local governments in Hampton Roads have committed to working with the federal government to protect assets of national importance and the people, infrastructure, and communities that support them. Notably, the Hampton Roads region has undertaken extensive work in partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to ensure the cities remain livable and federal assets are protected as the climate changes. Additional coordination is needed, however, to adapt and prepare for emergencies.

We believe appointing a coordinator within the DOD would build on existing work to advance our shared goals of a more climate resilient Hampton Roads. A coordinator would be well suited to address persistent challenges that have hindered the "whole of government" and "whole of community" approach that the growing threats require. The DOD's leadership would, for instance, help mitigate challenges related to turnover among military leadership assigned to local resilience planning and implementation efforts; develop clearer data sharing protocols for geographic information systems and infrastructure linkages between bases and host municipalities; and catalyze the implementation of emergency response policies that are synergistic rather than separate. Such an integrated approach is also key to ensuring the provision of resilient housing and transportation as well as the protection of critical ecosystems, all of which are essential to healthy, just, and well-functioning defense communities. As the climate continues to change, lessons learned from this partnership, as well as the possible appointment of coordinators in other regions, would be beneficial to defense communities and others that support federal entities and assets of national importance.

Establishing a coordinator within the DOD responsible for facilitating the continued planning and implementation at the regional level in Hampton Roads would enhance military readiness and provide a model for other communities working to prepare under blue skies. We stand ready to support you in standing up such an entity. Thank you for your consideration.

⁶ Congressional Research Service, *FEMA Hazard Mitigation: A First Step Toward Climate Adaptation* (R46989) (2022). Prepared by Diane Horn. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46989>

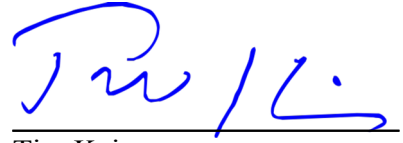
Sincerely,



Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Member of Congress



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Robert J. Wittman
Member of Congress



A. Donald McEachin
Member of Congress



Elaine G. Luria
Member of Congress

CC:

The Honorable Kamala Harris, Vice President

The Honorable Lloyd Austin, Secretary of Defense

The Honorable Deb Haaland, Secretary of the Interior

The Honorable Gina Raimondo, Secretary of Commerce

The Honorable Marcia Fudge, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg, Secretary of Transportation

The Honorable Jennifer Granholm, Secretary of Secretary of Energy

The Honorable Denis McDonough, Secretary of Veterans Affairs

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas, Secretary of Homeland Security

The Honorable Michael Regan, Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency

The Honorable Gina McCarthy, National Climate Advisor

The Honorable Brenda Mallory, Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality

The Honorable John Kerry, Special Presidential Envoy for Climate