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Economic Matters Committee

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Comprehensive Flood Management Grant Program Passes

Maryland General Assembly adopts legislation to award flood damages to local jurisdictions

Annapolis, MD (April 8, 2019) – Today, District 9B Delegate Courtney Watson and District 9 Senator Katie Fry Hester announced the passage of House Bill 428 and its companion cross file Senate Bill 269 in the Maryland General Assembly, **Comprehensive Flood Management Grant Program – Awards for Flood Damage and Mandatory Funding.**

HB428/SB269 places a minimum of \$8 million from the state in the Flood Mitigation Grant Fund between fiscal years 2021 – 2023 making it available to local jurisdictions while prioritizing historic districts that have suffered from more than one catastrophic flood. This grant fund will help local governments implement projects for flood control, provide for environmental quality of watersheds, implement capital projects and infrastructure repairs as well as emergency flood warning systems, and property acquisition in flood prone areas.

"What we thought of as 1000-year storms are becoming the new normal" said Delegate Courtney Watson. "Providing state funds to help manage floodwaters is critical to combat the deadly threat – both to human lives and to local economies. Ellicott City is the canary in the coal mine and the state must be ready to help communities throughout Maryland with the impact of more intense storms" said Watson, who was a County Councilwoman representing Ellicott City for eight years and who organized a flood relief effort for the town in 2016, and volunteered again in 2018. "This bill was a priority because of the Honorable Speaker Mike Busch and we are so grateful to him for supporting it from the beginning and ensuring its passage. As we mourn the enormous loss of Speaker Busch, we know his legacy will live on through the causes he championed and his tenacious efforts to help all Marylanders."

The frequency of severe storms accompanied by concentrated periods of rain have increased in recent years, leading to damaging flooding in communities around the state. Frederick, Washington, Cecil, Harford, Baltimore, Anne Arundel, Prince Georges, Montgomery, Howard, and Baltimore City have been affected. In July of 2016, Ellicott City experienced what was

called a “1000-year storm.” This single event dumped more than 6 inches of rain in 90 minutes on the hills around the historic town, resulting in a deadly flash flood that caused \$11 million of damage and took the lives of two Marylanders, Joseph Anthony Blevins and Jessica Watsula. Two years later, a similarly severe storm dumped 8.4 inches of rain in Ellicott City and 13 inches in Catonsville in just a few hours, causing \$27 million in damages to Ellicott City and taking the life of local hero Staff Sgt. Eddison Hermond.

Senator Hester, who volunteered in Ellicott City after the 2018 flood said, **“I saw firsthand how devastating these events can be to families, small businesses and historic buildings. At the same time, Marylanders are incredibly strong and resilient. To me, refilling this grant fund is about the future: smart rebuilding and innovative new partnerships to prevent future catastrophes.”**

In the past eight years there have been four designated Federal Emergency Management flood related disasters in Maryland, as compared to the single event in the entire preceding eight-year period. These four disasters alone cost Maryland communities millions in infrastructure damage, emergency management, debris removal and other expenses. FEMA can reimburse 75% of certain types of local government expenses when a disaster is declared, but the remaining costs, as well as costs to fund new capital projects to reduce future flooding in vulnerable areas greatly overburdens local governments. Without assistance from the state, affected towns face an incredible struggle to recover their economic vitality.

We look forward to the Governor signing this legislation, that was supported by Maryland League of Conservation Voters, Maryland Sierra Club, Maryland Association of Counties, Preservation Maryland, Maryland League of Women Voters, and Patapsco Heritage Greenway.

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