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October 11, 2022

The Honorable Levar M. Stoney
Mayor
City of Richmond
900 E. Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219

The Honorable Cynthia I. Newbille
City Council President
City of Richmond
900 E. Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Mayor Stoney and City Council President Newbille,

I write today concerning the urgent issue of climate change and the effects it may have on the city of Richmond. As we have seen in recent hurricane seasons, climate change has increased the frequency and magnitude of storms affecting the United States. With warmer air aloft, a storm or hurricane can hold more moisture and in turn cause heavier and more catastrophic rainfall, greatly exceeding what we would normally expect in a 100-year or even 500-year flooding event. This type of event, a so called “rain bomb,” was observed as a result of Hurricane Harvey and the devastating impact it had on the city of Houston, TX.

Richmond has its own history with severe flooding, and I fear that those instances of flooding in the city may increase as we continue to experience the effects of climate change. I believe it is imperative that we prepare the city for all possibilities. To begin planning on how to keep Richmond protected from the worst outcomes of a catastrophic flood, my staff and I held a briefing with the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to discuss the abilities of the Richmond floodwall and levee system to withstand and protect Richmond from potentially devastating flooding events that could result from climate-enhanced storms.

In this briefing USACE staff noted that the floodwall and levee system is built to withstand a 280-year flood event. However, USACE has not, to date, studied whether the resiliency of the system has diminished as the impacts of climate change have become more pronounced.

While I would like to ask that USACE undertake such a study, any effort to initiate a study on the climate resiliency of the Richmond floodwall and levee system by USACE would have to come at the request of the city or state government. I strongly urge the city to request that USACE begin such a study. This study’s main goal would be to determine whether the system

can withstand the growing threat of climate-enhanced storms and whether there are improvements that can be instituted to ensure that the Richmond floodwall and levee system does not fail when it is needed most. This could save countless lives in the event of a record-breaking flood event.

Equipping ourselves with all relevant information necessary to ensure the integrity of the Richmond floodwall and levee system through a study on climate resiliency is an important first step to preparing ourselves for the impacts of the climate crisis. I urge the city to take this proactive step to ensure the safety and resiliency of Richmond in the future, and I stand ready to support you in this important endeavor.

Sincerely,



A. Donald McEachin
Member of Congress

CC:

Council Vice President Ellen Robertson
Council Member Michael Jones
Council Member Reva Trammell
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Council Member Kristen Nye
Council Member Ann-Frances Lambert
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