

Joint Public Hearing

Climate Resilience Planning in the District and B24-410, the Flood Resilience Amendment Act of 2021

Before the Committee on Transportation and the Environment,
Committee on the Judiciary & Public Safety, and the Committee on
Business & Economic Development.

Councilmember Mary Cheh, Chair

Councilmember Charles Allen, Chair

Councilmember Kenyan McDuffie, Chair

January 10, 2022 10:00 AM

Via virtual Zoom Platform

Testimony of Kevin Clinton

Good morning, members of the Committee on Transportation and the Environment, the Committee on the Judiciary & Public Safety and the Committee on the Business & Economic Development.

My name is Kevin Clinton and I am the Chief Program Officer at the Federal City Council, a nonprofit civic organization dedicated to the vibrancy and improvement of Washington, DC. Previously, I served as the Chair of the Commission on Climate Change and Resiliency for Washington, DC and I am currently serving in a seat designated for the Federal City Council on DC's Flood Task Force. Today I am here to testify on the importance of developing a robust climate resilience plan and to support the Flood Resilience Amendment Act of 2021.

The Federal City Council has been an avid supporter of the city's efforts to embrace the resilience framework as a way of managing its long-term climate risks. We believe in the importance of developing long-term, sustainable plans to mitigate the impending consequences due to climate change. The impacts of climate change we face as a city need to be handled in a collaborative and strategic approach with buy-in from all government agencies and District stakeholders.

I also want to emphasize the importance of evaluating the methods through which DC seeks to meet its climate and resilience goals in the context of its position as a single jurisdiction in the middle of a wide metropolitan area. Measures should be crafted in recognition of this dynamic. We discourage measures that merely incentivize an activity to be moved from one jurisdiction

to another, with no net reduction in emissions or environmental impact, at the cost of DC's relative competitiveness and attractiveness.

I would like to credit this Council and Mayor with its leadership on climate and resilience issues including through the establishment of the Commission on Climate Change and Resiliency. During my tenure as Chair of the Commission, we drafted a set of recommendations which I am pleased to see DC has begun to implement. The commission's recommendations were formed from a variety of perspectives including those from universities, utilities, advocacy and environmental justice groups, and civic organizations. I'd like to discuss a few of those recommendations here today.

1. **First, Washington, DC must improve the coordination, prioritization and integration of existing resilience strategies and objectives.** There are several plans including Climate Ready DC, Sustainable DC 2.0 and Resilient DC that the city previously published. However, there is little cross collaboration among those plans. The District would benefit from coordinating the existing resilience strategies among government agencies in order to ensure a clear strategy for explicit deliverables and out-come based goals.
2. **The city should provide further integration of resilience into management and budget decisions.** The Commission found that there was a lack of funding that supports climate change resiliency plans and therefore no clear cut deliverables. The city should consider providing specified funding and/or provide further coordination for already existing funds.

- 3. Increase further oversight and accountability by developing short-term actions to reach long-term objectives.** The commission found that there was lack of oversight for existing regulations and therefore there was limited participation in resiliency efforts. In order to provide further accountability, it was recommended that the city adopt resilience planning into the District's Comprehensive Plan to ensure that resilience actions are enforceable.
- 4. Develop greater consistency of data and assessments of climate vulnerabilities.** While there is a developed process for climate projections and an assessment of potential climate change risks, climate science is not utilized to invest in strategic decision-making for the city. Given this information, it is recommended that the District solidify Resilience Standards and consistently update climate models and risk assessments.
- 5. Lastly, the city should implement a strategy to raise the public awareness of climate change and climate risk marketed towards a diverse set of stakeholders including the public and private sector and DC residents.** Strategies to engage residents lack diverse outreach and there is a need for further public awareness. The city should provide greater accessibility to the Resilient DC and Climate Ready DC plans, develop a strong social media presence and include sustainability initiatives in more educational programs.

Although I am no longer a member of the Commission, its work remains important and I encourage the District to embrace its model and continue to work with environmental

advocates, civic organizations, and the private sector to develop innovative and sustainable actions to make our city more resilient.

I'd now like to transition to bill B24-410, the Flood Resilience Amendment Act of 2021. Due to the rise in low-level flooding, Washington, DC needs a better process to establish policies that further protects residents from the consequences of flooding. The Flood Resilience Amendment Act can be one part of the solution. Instances where there is a lack of alignment between current levels of flood risk and flood insurance requirements should be fixed. We need to have insurance requirements aligned to that risk and this legislation gives us a path to get there by allowing the mayor to analyze and apply insurance requirements that are feasible and on par with the current risk.

This legislation should be just one part of an overall plan. It is even more important to invest in the resilient infrastructure necessary to limit flooding that may occur during major weather events than to rely exclusively on insurance to pay for the costs. As the Commission recommended, Capital budget decisions on public infrastructure should be viewed through this lens.

While the Flood Resilience Amendment Act is proactive in its approach, there are some things to watch out for. I encourage the mayor and the council to be attentive to areas where new requirements may run counter to other DC goals such as increasing housing supply, preserving affordable housing, maintaining competitiveness with surrounding jurisdictions and economic

growth. Collectively DC must ensure that it does not undermine ongoing projects vital to the District's efforts to achieve these other goals. To the extent that there are projects in process that meet city goals, DC should make sure that the implementation of this act doesn't threaten their completion. This is particularly important given the added complexity of completing major projects due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I appreciate the District's continued focus on climate change and resilience through this bill and the District's ongoing efforts. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Thank you.