



October 7, 2019

The Honorable Ralph S. Northam
Governor
The Commonwealth of Virginia
P.O. Box 1475
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Governor Northam:

According to the Virginia Hazard Mitigation Plan, flooding is the top hazard for all jurisdictions across the Commonwealth, impacting residents, businesses and infrastructure from Tidewater to the Appalachians.¹ Thankfully, in 2016 the Commonwealth created the Virginia Shoreline Resiliency Fund (SB 282) that would provide resources to communities to reduce flood risk. However, it has yet to receive any funding. An investment in this program would help reduce the devastating cycle of damage and repair, and ensure communities are more resilient to flooding and sea level rise.

The Pew Charitable Trusts urges you to make the Commonwealth's first investment in this program in your 2020-2022 budget proposal. Recent research shows that \$1 invested in pre-disaster mitigation – such as living shoreline projects to control erosion, wetland restoration to absorb floodwaters, buyouts of flood-prone properties, and reductions in impervious surfaces – results in a savings to society of \$6.² Fifty million dollars invested in the Virginia Shoreline Resiliency Fund could result in a net benefit of \$300 million.

If funded, the Virginia Shoreline Resiliency Fund would allow communities to undertake mitigation activities tailored to their unique flood risks and priorities. This strategy is taking hold in some localities and providing dividends. For example, a Virginia Department of Emergency Management loss avoidance study in Roanoke found that since the implementation of pre-disaster mitigation measures – acquiring flood-prone properties and creating greenspace, establishing the greenway, and other risk-reduction initiatives – the threat of severe flooding in these project areas has been significantly minimized.³ According to the 2015 Commonwealth Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment, almost \$46 million invested in mitigation projects across Virginia had been projected to result in nearly \$184 million in future loss and damage avoided.⁴ More communities could take advantage of this return should the state encourage and incentivize mitigation activities.

¹ Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM), *Commonwealth of Virginia Hazard Mitigation Plan (2018)* available at <https://www.vaemergency.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/COV-SHMP-3-2018-Public.pdf>.

² National Institute of Building Sciences, *Natural Hazard Mitigation Saves (2017)* available at https://www.nibs.org/page/ms2_form.

³ VDEM, *Commonwealth of Virginia Hazard Mitigation Plan (2018)*.

⁴ Department of Public Safety and Homeland Security, *2015 Commonwealth Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (C-THIRA)* available at <https://rga.lis.virginia.gov/Published/2015/RD369/PDF>.

The Pew Charitable Trusts thanks you for your leadership in working to make Virginia more resilient. We urge you to capitalize the Virginia Shoreline Resiliency Fund in order to reduce risks and costs to flood prone communities across the state. We welcome the opportunity to discuss this funding request with you further, as well as ideas for statutory changes to ensure the program benefits all Virginians and supports mitigation projects that steward the Commonwealth's natural resources. Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions at 202-552-2156 or Yaron Miller, State Campaigns Officer, at ymiller@pewtrusts.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Laura Lightbody".

Laura Lightbody
Director, Flood-prepared Communities
llightbody@pewtrusts.org

CC: The Honorable Aubrey Layne, Secretary of Finance
The Honorable Brian J. Moran, Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security
The Honorable Matthew Strickler, Secretary of Natural Resources
Suzette Denslow, Deputy Chief of Staff
Matt Mansell, Legislative and Policy Director