



**Verbal Testimony for The Pew Charitable Trusts as Prepared by Zachary Bartscherer on Behalf of the  
Flood-Prepared Communities Initiative  
Washington State Legislature  
House of Representatives  
Community and Economic Development Committee  
HB 1147 – Creating the Washington State Office of Resiliency  
February 2, 2021**

Madam Chair and members of the committee, my name is Zach Bartscherer, and I am an Officer with The Pew Charitable Trusts. On behalf of Pew's Flood-Prepared Communities Initiative, I am pleased to provide testimony in strong support of HB 1147.

Founded in 1948, Pew is a nonpartisan organization committed to data and science driven policy for the public good. Pew's Flood-Prepared Communities Initiative aims to mitigate the impact of flood-related disasters on communities and taxpayers by improving federal and state policy and programs to reduce risk for people and property from the nation's most common and most costly natural disaster. Through this work, Pew is also able to compare and work with flood disaster resilience and flood-risk reduction programs across the nation.

The threat of flood-related disasters is real and increasing in Washington State. According to the state's hazard mitigation plan, the costs of flooding in Washington exceed all other natural hazards<sup>1</sup>. Already, there is a more than 80% chance that 10 or more flood events will occur in any given year in the state and experts anticipate that the frequency of events will increase as the climate changes.<sup>2</sup>

Fortunately, investments in disaster mitigation and planning have proven effective in alleviating this problem. National research suggests that for every \$1 invested in disaster mitigation, the public saves an average of \$6 in future recovery costs.<sup>3</sup> For its part, the state of Washington is already taking important action to prevent future flooding. Investments in the Floodplains by Design program are showing a practical and meaningful impact.

However, the state can do more as outlined by both the Resilient Washington Subcabinet's September 2017 draft report and last November's final report and recommendations of the Office of Insurance

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<sup>1</sup> Washington Emergency Management Division, *Washington State Enhanced Hazard Mitigation Plan Risk and Vulnerability Assessment* (October 2018), <https://mil.wa.gov/enhanced-hazard-mitigation-plan>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> National Institute of Building Sciences, *Natural Hazard Mitigation Saves* (2017), <https://www.nibs.org/news/381874/National-Institute-of-Building-Sciences-Issues-New-Report-on-the-Value-of-Mitigation.htm>

Commissioner’s State Disaster Resiliency Work Group (DRWG). The central recommendation of the Work Group, in which several members of the Legislature participated, was that “Washington State create an ongoing resiliency program.”<sup>4</sup>

It is time to put these reports and recommendations into action. HB 1147 by Chair Ryu and sponsored by members of both parties is a true reflection of the DRWG recommendations, and we strongly support passage and implementation of this bill.

A resiliency program led by a leader with a singular focus would be able to craft a statewide comprehensive strategy to address flood risks and other hazards. Such a program could assess current critical infrastructure vulnerabilities and assets across state agencies, as well as identify shared threats to communities and regions. It could also examine key drivers of increased risk, including how that risk will likely change under future climate conditions and the disaster risk with under-resourced and traditionally marginalized communities.

A state-led resiliency program could add much-needed capacity to help jurisdictions connect with technical experts and programs across the state, access federal funding opportunities for mitigation projects, and address historic inequities, including those affecting people of color and tribes, within their communities. Such a plan would ensure that resilience becomes an integral and durable part of all the important services and investments that the state makes in coming years – from water quality protection and conservation to housing assistance; from transportation planning and infrastructure to support for the agricultural sector.

By establishing and maintaining a dedicated office to facilitate interagency and cross jurisdictional communication and collaboration, HB 1147 would enable the state to select and utilize the most cost-effective and equitable approaches to protect its people and resources from climate-related hazards, including flooding. And as resources from the federal government – especially those geared toward climate adaptation and resilience – become available, a centralized office and statewide plan would help allocate and deploy those dollars to shovel-ready projects and initiatives.

Pew is currently engaged in very productive conversations with the Governor’s Office on this topic and how a disaster resiliency strategy can be incorporated into a broader approach to tackling the impacts of climate change. We are fully committed to working with the Governor and the Legislature to put Washington State on a path toward comprehensive flood resiliency.

I would be happy to answer any of your questions, or you are welcome to contact our local partner, Josh Weiss with GTH Government Affairs.

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<sup>4</sup> Washington State Office of the Insurance Commissioner, *Washington Disaster Resiliency Work Group Final Report (November 2020)*, <https://www.insurance.wa.gov/sites/default/files/documents/washington-disaster-resiliency-work-group-final-report-november-2020.pdf>