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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

CONSERVATION, RESEARCH,
AND BIOTECHNOLOGY;
GENERAL FARM COMMODITIES,
RISK MANAGEMENT AND CREDIT;
COMMODITY MARKETS, DIGITAL ASSETS,
AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
HEALTH

January 14, 2026

The Honorable Sam Graves
Chairman
House Committee on Transportation &
Infrastructure
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rick Larsen
Ranking Member
House Committee on Transportation &
Infrastructure
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure. As we look toward the 2026 reauthorization of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA), I want to take this opportunity to highlight the life-changing impact this legislation has on the Metro East region of Illinois.

First, I want to thank the Committee for developing a strong, bipartisan WRDA in 2024. The Thomas R. Carper Water Resources Development Act included several of my requests to rehabilitate the infrastructure in communities that have suffered from devastating flooding, sewage backups, and stormwater overflows for far too long.

The 2024 WRDA laid a vital foundation for the Metro East in three key ways:

1. **Increased Capacity:** The 2024 WRDA boosted the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (USACE) authorization for their work in the Metro East from \$100 million to \$150 million, ensuring the Corps has the resources needed to make generational investments in our most vulnerable communities – including Cahokia Heights and East St. Louis.
2. **Modernized Scope:** The 2024 package included “stormwater management” as an eligible activity for the USACE in St. Clair and Madison Counties, aligning federal law with the actual needs of our region.
3. **Strategic Planning:** The 2024 WRDA authorized a General Reevaluation Report (GRR) for the USACE's activities in the Metro East and a feasibility study for the Spring Lake

detention pond – a project first recommended in 2009 that is essential for flood resilience and protecting local homes.

The House of Representatives built on this foundation just last week. In the Fiscal Year 2026 Energy & Water Appropriations bill, I worked with Senator Duckworth to secure \$7.3 million to rebuild Cahokia Heights’ East Interceptor Sewer. This interceptor sewer is the “spine” of the community’s wastewater system. When an interceptor of this scale fails – as it has for years in Cahokia Heights – the entire system backs up into streets, yards, and homes. This project was made possible specifically because of the increased authorizations we secured in the 2024 WRDA.

Additionally, I partnered with Senator Durbin to secure \$500,000 to begin the first phase of the General Reevaluation Report for East St. Louis and Vicinity. This study is the roadmap we need to accurately chart our path toward total infrastructure renewal across the Metro East. The General Reevaluation Report was specifically authorized and expedited in WRDA 2024.

While we have made significant strides, our work in the Metro East is far from finished. Just last week, the *Associated Press* documented the ongoing crisis in Cahokia Heights, where persistent stormwater and sewer backups have “buckled floors, cracked walls and destroyed belongings” in homes. Beyond the property damage, residents of the community face the public health risks of living with raw sewage and untreated runoff in their own homes.

At the same time, we are seeing the Administration pull back on promises that were made by the federal government to our most vulnerable communities. It is more important than ever for Congress and this Committee to honor our responsibility to these communities. As we move forward, I am committed to continuing to unify federal, state, and local partners to ensure that the people of the Metro East are no longer left behind.

Thank you again for your commitment to developing a strong, bipartisan WRDA in 2026, and I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today. I look forward to continuing our work together on these important issues, and I stand ready to work alongside the Committee, the Army Corps, and the local communities I represent to ensure we continue on a strong path forward. Please do not hesitate to contact me or my staff with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Nikki Budzinski
Member of Congress