

## **Rep. Fred Keller (PA-12) Testimony**

*House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee*

*Water Resources and Development Act (WRDA) Member Day Hearing*

*February 25, 2020*

Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Authorization in the Water Resources Development Act for needed upgrades to the Greater Williamsport Levee in Pennsylvania's 12<sup>th</sup> Congressional District can literally save lives as well as hundreds of millions of dollars in economic assets.

As you may know, Williamsport, Pennsylvania is home to Little League Baseball and the Little League World Series.

But what you may not know is that this amazing event, which attracts tens of thousands of visitors each year from around the

world and millions of viewers on television, sits directly in the path of a devastating flood zone.

This area is protected only by a levee in need of serious rehabilitation and improvements.

This levee was built in the 1950s by the Army Corps of Engineers and has protected the region ever since.

However, after a recent inspection by FEMA, large sections of the levee received a rating of “unacceptable.”

Currently, relief wells, cross pipes, and two I-walls are at risk of failure without significant rehabilitation and improvements.

The effects of a possible flood are nothing short of devastating.

The flood zone behind this 20-mile levee system is responsible for 87 percent of Lycoming County’s economic activity, which generates 80 percent of its tax revenues and employs 45 percent of the county’s workforce.

Just under half of the county's 116,000 residents live in the four highest-risk jurisdictions.

In addition, of the thousands of commercial, industrial, and institutional properties protected by the levee, around half of the county's largest employers—including Textron and ShopVac—and two institutions of higher education are at risk of major losses.

The assessed value of all of these properties is nearly three quarters of a trillion dollars.

Also 4,400 residential properties with a value of \$292 million are also at risk.

With all of this taken together, it is no wonder why the borough of Williamsport, four other municipalities in the affected region, and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania have contributed a significant local share to this project.

We were also pleased to see the levee project was included in the Army Corps of Engineers' Chief Engineers Report in the Main Table.

Recently, we were very happy to see the federal government contribute \$5.6 million to this very important project through the Economic Development Administration.

While we are off to a good start, additional federal investment is necessary to see this project through.

That is why authorization of this project in the Water Resources Development Act reauthorization is so critical.

We cannot allow the home of little league baseball to be the home of the next preventable flooding disaster.

We know problems with the levee exist now and now is the time to act.

With challenging and unpredictable weather patterns one cannot know with certainty when a devastating flood will impact this deteriorated levee system.

However, we can control what is in front of us and that is providing the needed resources in the Water Resources Development Act to complete this project sooner rather than later.

I urge the committee to include authorization for this project for the safety of Lycoming County businesses and residents.

Thank you.