Memorandum of Support

March 1, 2022

S.7582 (Mayer)/A.9216 (Otis)

Summary: Requires the examination of current and the recommendation of future standardized building code requirements for flood mitigation

Statement of Support: Roughly 90% of all U.S. natural disasters involve flooding, and just one inch of flood water can cause up to $25,000 in damage to a home.\(^1\) Between 2010 and 2018, the annual cost of flood damage in the United States was approximately $17 billion, four times more than was reported in the 1980s.\(^2\) As climate change continues to exacerbate sea level rise and increased sea surface temperatures, we can expect to see an uptick in the frequency and severity of flooding caused by extreme weather events.\(^3\) In recent years, New York has experienced significant loss, both in human life and property damage, from flooding associated with storms such as Hurricane Ida and Hurricane Sandy. Infrastructure, especially buildings, must be made more resilient to threats of flooding and coastal environmental hazards, but the law that sets requirements for the building code in New York currently does not take these threats into account.

This legislation would ensure that the threats posed by sea level rise, flooding, storms, and other water-related hazards in coastal and flood prone areas are taken into consideration by the Building Code Council and the state building code. Specifically, the bill would add a new Director of the Office of Emergency Management and a qualified expert in flooding mitigation to the State Building Code Council. The Council will be required to investigate how the building code could be changed to better protect buildings from the threats of sea level rise, flooding, storms, and other water-based hazards. Lastly, the building code must be updated to include new standards designed to protect life, property, and communities from flooding events. The legislation includes an amendment to the building code to include standards for construction, condition, occupancy, maintenance, conservation, rehabilitation and renewal of buildings to protect against sea level rise, flooding, and other hazards of coastal and floodplain environments.

While it is impossible to prevent floods entirely, the Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter strongly supports taking meaningful steps to prepare and lessen the impacts of their devastation. Flooding events have exposed vulnerabilities in New York’s infrastructure to the kind of extreme weather that is being generated by climate change, and improved flood risk management practices and updates to the building code will help New York become more prepared in the wake of natural disasters.

The Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter Strongly Urges Your Support of S.7582/A.9216.

\(^1\) https://www.fema.gov/flood-insurance
\(^2\) https://www.iii.org/fact-statistic/facts-statistics-flood-insurance