



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY

Opening Statement

**Chairwoman Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ)
of the Subcommittee on Environment**

Environment Subcommittee Hearing:
Working Toward Climate Equity: The Case for a Federal Climate Service

April 21, 2021

Good morning, and welcome to the first Environment Subcommittee hearing of the 117th Congress. I would also like to welcome Ranking Member Bice to the subcommittee. I look forward to continuing this subcommittee's bipartisan work to advance our understanding of the Earth system and support science that empowers us to confront the pressing challenges that we face with the climate crisis.

Climate change is increasingly an acute, costly reality for businesses and communities across the country, whether it is electric utilities facing increased threats from drought and wildfires or city streets inundated with stormwater runoff and sunny-day flooding.

As Congress considers investments to rebuild our country's infrastructure and take action to mitigate the most catastrophic impacts of the climate crisis, the best available science is crucial to making sure that precious dollars are spent on projects that will last.

Today's hearing is about making sure our Nation's state-of-the-art climate observations, modeling, and research makes it into the hands of the workers upgrading our highways and bridges, growing our food, and retrofitting our buildings.

The gaps in actionable climate risk information are impacting communities like the ones I represent in the 11th District of New Jersey. My constituents have long experienced flooding, but climate change is only increasing the risk for more frequent and intense heavy precipitation events in our area. For example, in 2018 nearly 5 inches of precipitation fell in just 50 minutes causing catastrophic flooding in Caldwell, Little Falls and Woodland Park, even carrying away 42 cars from a Jeep dealership. And when Hurricane Irene hit, rains flooded parts of Morristown, washing away the bottom floor of the historic Bethel AME church.

To help us understand how this reality will affect us in the near term, federal scientific agencies collect large-scale, trusted data from NOAA satellites and USGS stream gages. While these data inform some of the best climate models and research in the world, they don't always get translated into tools and local information that can help a family in Pequannock decide whether

to purchase a mortgage in a flood-prone area, or help a town manager in Pompton Lakes determine when to dredge rivers to minimize flood hazards, or assist officials in Fairfield assess the need to raise homes to avoid flooding damage.

This is both a science issue and an equity issue. The private sector is building innovative products underpinned by Federal data to help their clients understand and act on climate risk. However, at a time when state and local governments are resource-strapped, not all communities can hire consultants or a climate services firm to help them incorporate climate risk into their resilience planning.

Smaller and rural communities, as well as underserved communities and communities of color which are often hit first and worst by climate change, must have the basic information they need to make the difficult adaptation decisions we are facing now and in the years to come.

While the private sector is a critical partner, it cannot replace an authoritative, accessible baseline of Federal science and climate services. Federal climate services should also incorporate sustained feedback and co-production of knowledge with impacted communities to make sure the science remains decision-relevant as user needs rapidly change.

Earlier this year, I introduced two bills to tackle the challenge of flooding and improve climate risk information. The PRECIP Act would update nationwide, authoritative precipitation studies, and incorporate future climate risk into the studies, in order to improve local flood mapping, weather prediction, and resilience planning.

The FLOODS Act would establish a National Integrated Flood Information System at NOAA to coordinate and integrate flood research across the agency, and make improvements to flood forecasts, watches, and warnings.

These bills are just one piece of the puzzle when it comes to improving authoritative and actionable Federal tools and technical assistance for climate adaptation.

Similarly, I hope that this conversation is the beginning of a robust dialogue on the Subcommittee about what a system of Federal Climate Services should look like, and how it can best serve communities on the front lines of this crisis. I am pleased to welcome our distinguished panel of witnesses today who will help provide critical perspectives on this issue.

With that, I now recognize Ranking Member Bice for her opening statement.