LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF NEW JERSEY

January 11, 2023

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
Inland Flood Protection Rules Public Hearing

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to comment on the proposed Inland Flood Protection Rules. The League of Women Voters of New Jersey is a nonpartisan, public interest organization that takes positions on issues through study and consensus at the grassroots level. The League supports policies that protect and conserve natural resources, combat climate change, and protect public health. Addressing the impact that climate change has had on flooding and stormwater in New Jersey communities is essential to protecting the health and wellbeing of our residents. Thank you for releasing these proposed rules.

The League supports the rule changes and urges the NJDEP to adopt them as soon as possible. One of the most important improvements in these proposed rules is that they consider future flooding and climate change impacts instead of relying on present or historic flood events prior to 1999 to inform decisions. We appreciate that the proposed rules appropriately consider economic impacts, job impacts, environmental justice, and public safety. We support the balance between business and public interest that exists in these rules.

We do see a need for one change to the proposed rules. In order to properly protect New Jersey residents, the exemption for the Department of Transportation and highways in the state needs to be removed. Highways and transportation infrastructure are not exempt from the impacts of major storms, and we have witnessed the dangers that they pose to residents. A number of the deaths from Hurricane Ida occurred because of flooded cars. Please remove this exemption to ensure this does not happen again.

We are in a climate emergency. We need to adjust our activities to protect our present and future residents and our irreplaceable natural resources from the impacts of climate change. The oceans are warming, causing inevitable sea level rise along our coastlines and increased rainfall. Elevating the floodplain by two feet is scientifically proven to prevent more flooding, based on future predictions. However, repeated extreme events, record breaking high tides, and storm drains that are often level with rising water might call for further adjustments in the future. The costs of flood insurance continue to rise due to constant damage from floodwaters. New Jersey residents cannot afford to wait any longer for action. We believe these proposed rules are an important step towards addressing these issues.

The League of Women Voters supported the adoption of the Inland Flood Rules under an emergency status as originally intended last year. Until these new rules are adopted and implemented, new development permits should not be granted. The current proposed Inland Flood Protection Rules need to be adopted and implemented immediately and be followed as soon as possible by amendments upgrading the Coastal Zone Management and other regulations we rely on to protect NJ residents.

Thank you for your consideration.

Testimony Delivered by League of Women Voters of New Jersey Natural Resources Committee