

**Statement of Chairperson James Storey, Allegan County Board of Commissioners**

before the

Natural Resources and Environment Subcommittee

Senate Appropriations Committee

February 25, 2020

Good Morning, Chairman Bumstead and Senator Members of the Natural Resources and Environment Subcommittee.

I am Jim Storey, a member and currently chair of the Allegan County Board of Commissioners and serve on the Michigan Association of Counties Board of Directors. I appreciate this opportunity to testify before you on the serious disaster emergency faced by the Great Lakes shoreline counties of our state.

The near-historic rise of the Great Lakes and the high winds which buffeted our Allegan County shoreline late last year exacted a telling toll on our communities and the residents who live there.

This emergency has been talked about for several months. Except to speed up a too-slow permit process for shoreline property owners, precious little action has taken place to alleviate a shipwreck on the horizon for our fast-approaching summer tourism season.

In Allegan County, our Lakeshore Drive county road has suffered serious damage that needs attention immediately and, long term, needs re-location. Currently, some 12 homeowners are isolated because the roadway has been eroded to a dangerous passage level. Fire, sheriff and ambulance services are prevented from accessing the area.

Temporary repairs would cost our road commission \$800,000 while a permanent relocation has been estimated at \$5,000,000. We are not the only county in this situation.

I am advised the County Road Association of Michigan is surveying its members for a list of roads in similar situations as our Lakeshore Drive. Even before that survey is completed, a road association official stated one county road in the Upper Peninsula is in failure condition due to erosion caused by wave action on the great lake it borders.

While this cost is daunting, of even greater concern is the ugly condition of our shorelines littered with flotsam and jetsam tossed against our Lake Michigan shore by the wind-driven high water beating against our shores.

I have attached a few photos taken recently of certain sections of the Lake Michigan shoreline in Allegan County. I think you will agree summer visitors will be shocked when they attempt to access the lake from littered beaches. They may well abandon our state as a place to spend their summer vacation.

With the 2020 navigation season officially just a few weeks away, this is a serious threat to our extremely vital tourism industry which employs hundreds if not thousands of Michigan residents.

Can you imagine the beating Pure Michigan will take if this trash is not removed? Will Michigan's image be bolstered if a commercial or recreational vessel hits a navigational hazard caused by debris in our waters and sinks, perhaps injuring those on board?

Current emergency disaster funding is tied to a mechanism that was never designed to address our current Great Lake emergency. Among the many stop points in state and federal law is the requirement that county emergency managers document the start of a disaster and an end to said disaster.

This disaster is ongoing and if Corps of Engineers and NOAA predictions come true, it will continue for the year ahead.

Action is needed now, not after a so-called action task force meets and discusses the situation.

So, what is to be done?

Allegan County needs and deserves an emergency appropriation from the state to relocate our tourist-oriented Lakeshore Drive. Our county and 23 of our 24 townships already tax themselves in addition to state-shared revenue to maintain our county road system. We are among only a handful of Michigan counties that do so.

In other words, we don't ask you first for funds; we do our job before we ask for help, but we need the help of our State Government now.

Our beaches need immediate attention to remove the wreckage. The Governor of Indiana has already tasked his reports to assess damage to that state's Lake Michigan shore to document the need for emergency funding.

In comparison to that state, our Great Lakes shorelines in both peninsulas are much longer and the threat to our tourism economy is many times greater.

Our state government should take the same, even more urgent action as the Hoosier state while at the same time getting the three state agencies organized to protect our state – the DNR, EGLE and the State Police -- in gear to retain those with the skill, knowledge and equipment to remove that debris.

Some have suggested this task – removing beach debris that consists of torn-off decks, stairways, barbecue grills, large trees, and docks among other things – could be a training exercise for engineering units of the National Guard.

With the 147 vetoes of funding for various projects this fiscal year freeing up millions of dollars, we need to utilize those frozen funds to attack this natural disaster.

When Katrina hit the gulf coast and the 2012 Atlantic coast storm hit New Jersey and other nearby states, the Congress appropriated extra emergency funds to help those states rebuild. This was in addition to funds triggered by the current legal mechanism. Michigan counties need that same spirit of response to this disaster emergency that hit our shores, our

communities and our residents.



We need Michigan's state government to engage in this emergency, now, not some years ahead.





