



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Office of the Governor

Ralph S. Northam
Governor

December 7, 2021

My Fellow Virginians,

Nearly four years ago when the Commonwealth began the process of developing this document, we knew Virginia had a long way to go to adapt to our coastal flooding problems – both present and future. I was raised on the Eastern Shore – this is personal to me – and I know our coastal communities are already struggling with the consequences of climate change, and that the best science predicts that conditions will worsen in the coming years. After completing the exercise of crafting the Commonwealth’s first ever Coastal Resilience Master Plan, we now have a clearer picture of the scope and scale of the challenges facing the Commonwealth.

The Virginia Coastal Resilience Master Plan describes and identifies many projects proposed by local governments and other sponsors that will make some areas and assets more resilient in the near term. However, there are many areas of identified risk for which neither short nor long term solutions currently exist. For that reason, perhaps the most important information provided by this initial Master Plan is the identification of the broad gaps in flood protection and adaptation capacity and coverage all along our coastline, as well as the need for additional data and analysis to further refine our understanding of the impacts of climate change.

Getting to this point is essential and significant progress.

The Commonwealth has now developed a baseline level of knowledge about where and to what degree sea level rise and storm surge will increase flooding, and what communities and built and natural infrastructure will be impacted. We have integrated that knowledge into the Master Plan and related state resilience and adaptation initiatives, which will help us support responsible coastal planning and direct financial assistance and technical support where it is most needed. We will continue to refine our understanding of coastal climate change impacts by adding in predictive rainfall models and other new data, broaden our outreach efforts to impacted communities, and turn our focus to coastal areas with the most risk and need.

The science behind this Plan also shows definitively that some communities and facilities in Virginia will cease to be habitable or accessible over the next 60 years because of more frequent flooding, impacts from catastrophic events, or permanent inundation. And while the Plan identifies critical components of the built environment that we should protect where they are, even at great cost, it is clear that we must also focus on the most important and effective flood protection measure of all: moving people and structures out of harm’s way. It is our duty as public servants to have honest, frank conversations with residents about these facts, and to back up those conversations with action that

supports and incentivizes adaptation and protection measures while also pursuing the difficult but strategic and orderly relocation of individuals, communities, and economic assets.

Future versions of the Virginia Coastal Resilience Master Plan will continue to identify and prioritize adaptation strategies that are realistic, not wishful. Climate change will permanently alter the physical limits of our coastal lands, but with thoughtful planning and a willingness to make tough decisions, we can adapt and maintain the thriving communities, economies, and ecosystems that make coastal Virginia such a special place.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ralph S. Northam". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Ralph S. Northam