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## Clean water is the path to a more sustainable, equitable Delaware | Opinion

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In April, the Clean Water Campaign saw an historic first: House Bill 200, the Clean Water for Delaware Act, passed the Delaware House unanimously. This sweeping piece of legislation — more than 5 years in the making — led by House Majority Leader Valerie Longhurst and Senate Majority Leader Bryan Townsend, will create the Clean Water Trust, intended to “ensure the greatest environmental return” on investments for drinking water, wastewater, drainage and other water projects. It will set a priority for loans in underserved communities, encourage the use of green infrastructure in future projects and create an annual strategic plan for clean water investments.

HB 200 is now in the state Senate to be heard in the coming weeks. The gravity of this bill, and the power it has to change lives is truly monumental. The need for clean water in Delaware is urgent. We ask the Senate to ensure speedy passage of this bill, as well as the Capitol Improvement Committee to approve Gov. John Carney’s proposal of \$50 million in clean water investments.

The need for HB 200 and investments in clean water infrastructure are clear:

- 90% of Delaware’s waterways are polluted from excess nutrients and legacy toxins.
- 100 miles of waters have fish consumption advisories from high PCBs, metals and pesticides.
- Loss of an estimated average of one acre of tidal wetlands in the region daily. Tidal wetlands are host to a diverse array of wildlife and act as a natural barrier to flooding.
- Flooded and damaged waterways pose a threat both to our health and our economic viability through tourism, which accounts for 10% of Delaware’s economy.

### The Clean Water For Delaware Act

This transformational piece of legislation will create the Clean Water Trust, which in turn would create the ability to fund a large array of projects spanning from improved wastewater management to providing clean drinking water to more Delawareans. It provides the necessary framework to lead Delaware to a more sustainable, more equitable future.

## **Underserved communities are a priority**

If we do not pass the Clean Water for Delaware Act, who remains the most at risk? Well, the short answer is all of us, and our future generations. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us over and over again that those most vulnerable among us are the hardest hit by times of crisis. It is imperative that we pass HB 200 and begin allocating funding for the implementation of projects that provide direct assistance to areas where access to clean drinking water is limited. We all have a right to enjoy access to a healthy environment free of contaminants and pollutants.

## **Flooding and the need for green infrastructure**

One easily recognizable consequence of inaction is the inability to travel on the roads of our state. With increasing severe weather, rapidly disappearing wetlands and buffers, we are quickly becoming prone to a travel system that can collapse under heavy rain. HB200 will help us not just fund programs that keep unhealthy contaminants out of our stormwater, but allow us to begin building safe, natural solutions to flooding. Thereby preparing us, and the generations that follow us, for whatever our climate brings.

In the wake of a deadly virus, a nationwide reckoning with justice and civil unrest, and the rapidly escalating threat of climate change, Delaware finds itself with a rarity among such hard times: a real opportunity. The General Assembly is ideally positioned to take preventive action to protect the future of our state, as well as restorative action to protect our citizens right now. While lawmakers this year have much to address, passing HB 200, the Clean Water for Delaware Act, must remain a top priority.

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