



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

Chairwoman Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ) of the Subcommittee on Environment
Statement for the Record on H.R. 3952, the “NOAA Chief Scientist Act”

April 5, 2022

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration exercises jurisdiction over critical sectors of our economy linked to oceans and waterways, but it also has far-reaching scientific responsibilities for assessing climate and weather developments and informing every level of government and the American public with actionable information about the weather. Individuals in my district, small and large businesses, state and federal agencies—they all rely on critical climate and weather data and predictions from NOAA to plan ahead, prepare, and make important decisions on a daily basis. Because of the outsized impact of its science, NOAA deserves the highest level of scientific leadership.

Currently, NOAA’s Chief Scientist role lacks adequate guidance about necessary qualifications, eligibility, and responsibilities. My bill provides these elements in a framework that will help Congress ensure that the Chief Scientist’s selection meets the high scientific and professional standards necessary to support NOAA’s scientific mission.

The bill provides clarity on the necessary qualifications of the Chief Scientist and specifically directs the Chief Scientist to adhere to and enforce high scientific integrity standards within NOAA. It also promotes transparency on this work by directing the Chief Scientist to issue public reports on NOAA’s scientific work and on the scientific work funded by NOAA at outside institutions and universities.

As a scientific agency, NOAA should avoid politics. Americans rely on NOAA for accurate weather forecasts, which help them and their local governments plan ahead and prepare for dangerous weather, like hurricanes and other natural disasters. NOAA’s mission is essential to constituents like those in towns in my district in northern New Jersey who rely on NOAA weather predictions to understand the path and potential impacts of storms, like Hurricane Ida, and then prepare accordingly. One woman who, along with her young children, had to be rescued from her home at night during Hurricane Ida said that she had been told at 5 pm that the hurricane would pass to the west. As evidenced by the very short warning window for Hurricane Ida, and the catastrophic damage that followed, we must constantly be working to improve NOAA’s forecasting ability. My bill would help do just that, and would further preserve the status of NOAA as a neutral agency by prioritizing scientific credentials and consensus, such as input from the National Academies of Science, over political considerations in the Chief Scientist’s appointment.

The American public should never have to wonder whether a weather forecast is driven by scientific facts. This law preserves the public's trust by codifying the Chief Scientist's responsibility to uphold principles of scientific integrity and discipline within NOAA's workforce. That's why I am so pleased to be joined by Representative Feenstra in offering this bipartisan effort to strengthen the Chief Scientist's role at NOAA. Thank you.