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14TH DISTRICT, FLORIDA

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January 7, 2022

The Honorable Wilton Simpson
President
409 The Capitol
404 S. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100

The Honorable Chris Sprowls
Speaker
Florida House of Representatives
420 The Capitol
402 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300

RE: Protect Tampa Bay economy and Tampa Bay

Dear President Simpson and Speaker Sprowls:

As Tampa Bay area leaders, I trust you share my commitment to protecting the Tampa Bay area economy, the health of Tampa Bay itself and the entire watershed. **I urge you to act to protect and improve the water quality of Tampa Bay in the upcoming legislative session.** The devastating Piney Point disaster in 2021 and the resulting red tide, together with sewage overflows, water quality degradation and manatee die offs require action. Pollution in Tampa Bay has reduced the healthy seagrass beds after decades of improvement. Fish, manatees and marine life are hurting.

The historic bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (“IIJA”) provides the State of Florida and local communities with important new resources to clean up Tampa Bay, and I have highlighted recommendations below. Many of the federal clean water funding initiatives require action by the State and local communities, so **I encourage you to act swiftly this session on the many initiatives that will improve the water quality of Tampa Bay and boost our economy.**

The IIJA provides robust new resources to **modernize local water and wastewater infrastructure**, keep costs down for homeowners and address costly extreme events fueled by the climate crisis. The IIJA permanently requires states to distribute a minimum of 10 percent (and a maximum of 30 percent) of their State Revolving funds to municipalities as grants to increase the affordability of wastewater infrastructure to local communities. The Act also prioritizes investments in green infrastructure as well as water- and energy-efficiency to increase the resiliency of utilities to climate change and address vulnerabilities to man-made or natural disasters and cyberattacks. Importantly, the Act protects local water quality and public health by investing in the repair and replacement of failing septic systems, including communities that currently lack access to adequate sewage treatment systems. An additional focus is needed for failing and poorly maintained private lateral pipes within older communities, which can overwhelm the public sewer systems. Public utilities need support to remove any barriers they might face in addressing leaky

pipes on private homeowner properties. I urge you to expedite these resources to local communities.

Federal Covid19 emergency aid is boosting the State of Florida's ability to address important needs, including a **closeout (once and for all) of the abandoned Piney Point gypsum stack**. The devastating breach should have never been repeated after the first toxic overflow in 2003. I am sure you agree with the need to eliminate the hazard that Piney Point presents, and that you share my belief that it is unfortunate that the taxpayers are on the hook for the cost of the disaster. Proceeds from any lawsuits against HRK Holdings should **reimburse Florida taxpayers**. The State has an obligation to oversee the reclamation of gypsum stacks along Tampa Bay and **prevent these devastating disasters from ever happening again**.

I urge the State to **expedite purchase and conservation of property along Tampa Bay and throughout the watershed**. Florida voters overwhelmingly support land conservation efforts as demonstrated by support from stakeholders like the Tampa Bay Estuary Program and passage of Amendment 1 to the Florida Constitution in 2014 that directed the state to conserve "lands including wetlands and forests; fish and wildlife habitat; lands protecting water resources and drinking water sources, ... and the water quality of rivers, lakes, and streams; beaches and shores; outdoor recreational lands; ... for 20 years." Unfortunately, the State has not lived up to its responsibility to Floridians, and has even diverted monies away from these critical conservation efforts. Please act before it is too late to purchase and conserve these vital areas. They are "cost-savers" in the long run for taxpayers.

The State's Blue Green Algae Task Force offered important **recommendations** in 2019 that **should be implemented** by the State as soon as possible to address the primary drivers of algal blooms and degradation of aquatic ecosystems, which can exacerbate inflow and infiltration issues that cause sanitary sewer overflows.

You know how fragile the health of **Upper Tampa Bay** and its surrounding communities of , Town n' Country, Oldsmar, Safety Harbor are, and that they can be overlooked, but the state and agencies like the **Southwest Florida Water Management District, and Florida Department of Transportation must do more to improve the water quality in this area**. For example, current initiatives along the Howard Frankland and Gandy Blvd bridges, still fail to consider alterations as needed infrastructure improvements that would benefit the Tampa Bay ecosystem and economy. The bridge replacement projects must prioritize better water circulation, the flushing and protection of the wetlands in the area.

Important partners like the Tampa Bay Estuary Program, the Agency on Bay Management and cities and counties need support for their efforts to protect our local economy, jobs and the natural environment that makes living in the Tampa Bay area so special. Don't tie the hands of local communities that seek to protect Tampa Bay, local neighborhoods and economic interests. Instead, I urge you to **help them improve environmental protection efforts** and thereby **save enormous sums of tax dollars that are spent responding to catastrophes**.

Together, we can improve the health of Tampa Bay and the entire ecosystem, and ensure that our local economy remains strong. Thank you for the opportunity to share my recommendations and for your service to the State of Florida and Tampa Bay.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Castor". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kathy Castor,
U.S. Representative
Fourteenth District, Florida

Cc:
City of Tampa, Mayor Jane Castor
Hillsborough County Commissioners
Hillsborough County Administrator, Bonnie Wise
Hillsborough County Legislative Delegation