DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

COMPLETE WRITTEN STATEMENT OF

COLONEL FRANCIS B. PERA

COMMANDER, BALTIMORE DISTRICT

BEFORE

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ON

Potomac Interceptor Event

MAY 20, 2026

Chairman Joyce, Vice Chairman Balderson, Ranking Member Clarke, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am honored to testify before you today on the Potomac Interceptor Event and represent the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Baltimore District.

Before I discuss our involvement, I want to begin by reiterating that the Washington Aqueduct's regional drinking water supply remains safe and unaffected, as our drinking water system is entirely separate from the regional wastewater infrastructure. For more than 165 years, our mission has been to provide safe water to the National Capital Region, and that mission remains secure.

When the Potomac Interceptor collapsed, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers moved immediately to ensure the safety of Washington Aqueduct operations. The Aqueduct collects Potomac River 'source water' at two locations – Great Falls and Little Falls.

The spill happened downstream from our primary water intake at Great Falls, which means sewage was flowing away from the intake and did not pose a risk to water supply. For the Committee's awareness, this facility was able to provide all the necessary raw water required to meet water demand at the time of the incident, which was approximately 130 million gallons a day. Demand is significantly lower during the cold winter months.

In fact, the Great Falls facility can provide up to 200 mil gallons a day with no reliance on electricity via its gravity fed design, which exceeds even our peak summer demand of approximately 150 mil gallons a day. Because Great Falls is more cost effective and fully capable of meeting demand, our secondary water intake at Little Falls was not in operation during the spill. Little Falls, in fact, had been offline since fall 2025 and remained closed throughout the response effort.

Regarding the response effort, under authority granted to us by Public Law 84-99, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers activated its Emergency Operations Center on Feb. 20, 2026, in support of the District of Columbia's Emergency Declaration for Potomac Interceptor Collapse Response efforts.

Within 24 hours, we were on the ground, executing an emergency contract clearing the way for USACE to provide engineering expertise. Our engineers designed a 12-point stormwater diversion system and had it in place in less than a week. This accomplished two vital things: it kept DC Water work crews and the bypass system safe while allowing for emergency repairs to continue; and helped to inhibit further pollution from entering the Potomac River.

The system worked as intended and remained in place until May 5, which marked the closure of interagency federal response. For months, the system protected Environmental Protection Agency and DC Water work crews while they conducted emergency repairs and environmental remediation.

Additionally, under the EPA's direction, USACE completed their environmental remediation activities in affected areas 2 and 3 of the collapse site on March 16. This included using hand tools to remove up to 3 inches of accumulated material in the creek bank areas downstream of Rock Run Culvert where visual contamination was identified, then transported to an off-site disposal facility.

USACE continues to monitor the situation. Washington Aqueduct staff collects Potomac River source water samples at both Great Falls and Little Falls intakes Monday to Friday, to ensure raw water quality levels are within normal ranges for source water.

To further detail the Washington Aqueduct's mission, both Great Falls and, when operational, Little Falls intakes source water from the Potomac River, which then travels via conduits to the Dalecarlia Reservoir prior to distribution to one of two Water Treatment Plants in DC.

Upon arrival, it undergoes full conventional treatment before water is distributed to each of our wholesale customers, DC Water, Fairfax Water and Arlington County, and from them to faucets throughout DC and Northern Virginia. The quality of the water being produced at the Washington Aqueduct is excellent. It meets or exceeds all EPA standards and requirements.

This gravity fed system is part of the original design of the Aqueduct and allow us to operate intakes even during a power failure – an important consideration during inclement weather and power emergencies.

I'll end by saying that USACE continues to stand prepared to do what we do best: provide engineering solutions for our Nation's toughest challenges. We look forward to discussing and working with the Committee on this very important issue.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of this Committee. This concludes my statement, and I look forward to answering any questions you or other Members of the Committee may have.