



**Testimony Supporting HB 24
House Environment & Transportation Committee
February 21, 2024**

Position: Favorable with amendment.

Dear Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and Members of the Committee,

Interfaith Power & Light (DC.MD.NoVa) is a grassroots organization working directly with religious communities of faith as we respond to the climate crisis. In Maryland, our organization has relationships with 900 congregations across the state. We are called by our different faith traditions to raise our voices in protection of our neighbors and our common home, and to fight for environmental justice, in which no community has an unfair burden of environmental harms or exclusive access to environmental benefits.

We are writing this testimony to urge a favorable report with amendment on HB 24, the Maryland Department of the Environment Permitting Authority bill.

The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) Permitting Authority bill is a small, but significant, step forward in addressing environmental racism and injustice in Maryland. The bill would require MDE to screen certain pollution permit proposals for environmental justice considerations. These considerations factor in sociodemographic information and other data to determine whether the pollution proposed will take place in Maryland's most underserved and overburdened communities, where sensitive populations are already exposed to disproportionately high levels of pollution.

This bill would require MDE to conduct an environmental justice evaluation for covered permits in "covered communities". Covered communities include any census tract with an Environmental Justice (EJ) score **above 75**. A score this high reflects a community is in the top quarter of the state for four key indicators: pollution burden exposure, pollution burden environmental effects, sensitive population, and sociodemographic data. Communities scoring in this range face the greatest health and wealth disparities compared to the rest of the state. The covered permits include a subset of new and/or renewal pollution permits for some of Maryland's biggest industrial polluters.

The MDE Permitting Authority Bill authorizes MDE to respond to its environmental justice evaluation by denying or imposing conditions on new or renewal permits that would otherwise worsen the pollution burden borne by covered communities. Research shows that Black communities in Maryland [face greater cancer risks](#) and exposure to air toxins, primarily due to highway pollution and other mobile sources of air pollution. It is critical MDE has this authority to respond as more of our neighbors are exposed to harmful pollutants impacting their health.

Passing this legislation would align with the state’s aggressive climate action and environmental justice plans, as well as Governor Moore’s campaign commitment to prioritize “environmental justice for the low-income communities and communities of color facing the worst effects of climate change by taking action to address extreme heat, improve access to cleaner public transit, increase tree canopy cover to reduce pollution and cool the climate, and ensure equitable access to electric vehicles and charging infrastructure.”

Amendment Requested: This bill will make a more meaningful impact if it covers more permits, including Part 70, or Title V, permits. These are the permits that regulate a facility’s ongoing air emissions as part of their operations. Facilities applying for a Title V permit include facilities that emit more than 100 tons per year of any air pollutant. Maryland has 109 Title V permits total in the state, and 40% of them are located in communities with an EJ score above 75. Addressing large sources of air pollution is a critical step towards environmental justice in the state.

Interfaith Power & Light (DC.MD.NoVa.) respectfully requests this committee issue a favorable with amendments report on HB 24, including the amendment in this testimony to include Title V air emissions permits as covered permits in this legislation.