



Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments

Bringing Science and Passion to the Environmental Health Movement

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Testimony Supporting SB0978

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

February 25, 2025

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee,

As a resident of Carroll County, an Environmental Health Nurse researcher and advocate, and a steering committee member of the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments, I am writing to express my strong support of SB978, the CHERISH Our Communities Act.

The CHERISH Our Communities Act will address the disproportionate environmental and public health harms that environmental justice communities in Maryland face from pollution generating facilities. For decades, these facilities have been disproportionately and deliberately sited in minority and economically distressed communities in Maryland. Low-wealth, Black, and other communities of color in Maryland [face greater cancer risks and exposure to air toxics](#) due to higher pollution burden.

The CHERISH Our Communities Act amends Maryland's environmental law to provide adequate environmental impact assessment and opportunities for public participation for new, renewed, and expanded environmental permits that are issued by the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE). Currently, many environmental permit applications do not even include a public engagement process, and do not take into consideration the cumulative harms posed by multiple and historic sources of pollution. The CHERISH Act prioritizes Maryland residents' well-being and ensures that MDE's decision-making processes are transparent and inclusive.

Since 2002, I have worked with communities facing multiple health and environmental impacts from many permitted facilities in their neighborhoods but have no ability to address the cumulative risk because the current permitting process only considers one property at a time. As one example, we have worked closely with the community of Curtis Bay who have well over 50 air, water discharge and hazardous waste permitted facilities including the CSX coal terminal, landfills, chemical plants, and a medical waste incinerator that accepts trash from as far away as Canada. The cumulative, repetitive exposures to



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this toxic soup causes and exacerbates respiratory issues like asthma, cardiovascular issues, and a variety of cancers.

Curtis Bay is not alone. There are many communities in the whole state of Maryland that would benefit from this simple, extra step, to verify cumulative impact before granting future permits.

I urge you to support SB0978 and protect the communities already overburdened by current environmental insults.

Robyn Gilden, PhD, RN

Steering Committee Member, Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments