

Testimony Urging Passage of SB0978
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 25, 2025

Position: Strongly SUPPORT

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Tiffany Thompson, and I am a resident of Curtis Bay who has also lived in Cherry Hill. I am writing to express my strong support for SB978, the CHERISH Our Communities Act.

As a former school teacher at Curtis Bay Elementary, I saw firsthand how many students suffered from asthma and other respiratory illnesses. It was heartbreaking to witness young children struggling to breathe, knowing that this was largely due to the environmental conditions in our community. Now, as a resident, I have experienced the full extent of environmental injustices in Curtis Bay—living through a massive explosion at the CSX coal terminal, a deadly fire at Petroleum Management, the constant flow of hundreds of trucks through our neighborhood every hour, daily exposure to coal dust and fine particulate matter, and the ongoing pollution from the BRESKO incinerator, whose toxic ash is dumped right here in our community.

Curtis Bay is surrounded by over 100 pollution sources. This has never been right. The consequences of this reality are well known—residents suffer from health conditions that could have been avoided if policymakers took existing pollution burdens into account. Other states, like New York, New Jersey, and Minnesota, have adopted policies to address cumulative impacts in environmental permitting decisions. Maryland must do the same.

Right now, our community is facing an expansion request from Grace Chemical, the largest source of toxic releases in Baltimore City, and from PMI, the same company that caused a fatal fire and operated illegally without a permit for nearly a decade. This is what happens when pollution is concentrated in just a few communities—it fundamentally undermines the principle that every child has an equal opportunity to grow up healthy. It is simply false to claim that a child born in Curtis Bay has the same chance at a healthy life as a child born elsewhere in Maryland. That is a lie.

We have the power to change this over time and create better development opportunities, rather than continuing to sacrifice certain neighborhoods. And before anyone argues that these polluting industries are sited based on sound technical reasoning, I urge you to look at history. The BRESKO incinerator was originally planned for North Baltimore, but when residents there opposed it, the city ultimately chose to build it next to an existing incinerator in Cherry Hill—doubling the burden on a predominantly Black community while sparing a white one. This pattern of decision-making must end.

The CHERISH Act is a crucial step toward justice. It will help ensure that no community is forced to bear an unfair and unhealthy pollution burden simply because it has been overlooked in past decisions. I urge you to support SB978 and help create a fairer, healthier Maryland for all.

Sincerely,
Tiffany Thompson
Resident, Curtis Bay