



Committee: Education, Energy and the Environment

Testimony on: SB978 Environmental Permits - Requirements for Public Participation and Impact and Burden Analyses (Cumulative Harms to Environmental Restoration for Improving Shared Health - CHERISH Our Communities Act)

Position: Favorable

Hearing: February 21, 2025

As president of Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility, an organization of 900 supporters whose mission includes addressing the climate crisis, pollution related morbidity and mortality as well as health disparities in Maryland, we strongly support the Cherish Act, SB978 enabling MDE to take environmental justice scores, cumulative pollution burden and public input into decisions about whether to issue a permit to an industrial source of additional pollution.

In 2013, Baltimore City Health Department created a report on life expectancy at birth in Baltimore city and the Curtis Bay area was among the lowest in the City.¹ That same year, a group of high school students in Curtis Bay learned about an incinerator that a company in Albany, New York, was planning to be build a mile from their school. They organized petitions, then protests asking the Maryland Department of the Environment to pull a permit that had already been violated by this proposed largest trash-burning incinerator in the United States. After 2 years of actions, and legal help from an organization of environmental lawyers, they were successful and MDE finally pulled the permit.

Today that community is still home to 70 sources of industrial of air pollution. IN 2017, the city Board of Health reported that in Curtis Bay reported a higher incidence of respiratory illness, heart disease, all cancer than the city as a whole.²

¹ <https://health.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/Life-expectancy-2013.pdf>

² <https://www.thebaltimorebanner.com/community/public-health/what-its-like-to-live-in-the-epicenter-of-toxic-pollution-QN7KNX5F3ZDH5KG3HE7YRDPPNQ/>

Bresco, Maryland's largest trash incinerator, is in south Baltimore. One year's monetized health costs from air pollution from just particulate matter PM2.5 cost Maryland over 22 million dollars according to a 2017 report.³ Now advocates from South Baltimore have filed a civil rights complaint with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on behalf of people who are suffering.⁴

Curtis Bay Energy runs the largest medical waste to energy facility in the country, now called Curtis Bay Energy. It was fined \$1.75 million for in 2023 for improperly incinerating its waste. In 2024 they were sued again by the state. That incinerator in the very tip of south Baltimore, is receiving medical waste from as far away as Florida and Canada with Maryland supplying a minority of the waste and Baltimore only 7% and yet downwinders in the state are being subjected to pollution coming out of its smoke stack.⁵

A study published in a peer reviewed journal October 2024, demonstrated that dust collected in 2 residential sites in Curtis Bay, was from the CSX coal terminal as residents have been claiming.⁶ This is one of two Baltimore coal terminals supplying 30% of U.S. exports going to countries across the globe, worsening the global climate crisis while Curtis Bay residents suffer from the coal dust and Particulate Matter 2.5 pollution in their own neighborhood. Residents of Curtis Bay and the rest of Baltimore packed a public hearing with the Maryland Department of the Environment, asking that the CSX air pollution permit not be renewed.

Residents of Prince George's County, are fighting for their own right to breathe clean air. Brandywine in particular is exposed to inexcusable examples of environmental and racial injustice. It has 4 power plants and is 67% black.⁷ They have had to fight against another (gas fired) power plant coming to their area.

In addition, diesel trucks, groundwater pollution from a military toxic waste dump and PM2.5 from a coal ash.⁸ are some examples of why this bill is needed. The coal ash dump was recently rated the 7th worst such site in the nation.⁹

Why should citizens have to fight the Maryland Department of the Environment for environment justice and their right to be able to breathe healthy air in their own neighborhood? Why should they have to fight for their right for their children to have the same life expectancy as children in other neighborhoods. Why does it take suits from environmental legal experts

³ <https://www.cbf.org/document-library/cbf-reports/thurston-wheelabrator-health-impacts-2017.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.cbf.org/news-media/newsroom/2024/maryland/south-baltimore-advocates-file-civil-rights-complaint-on-incinerator-pollution>

⁵ <https://www.baltimorebrew.com/2024/08/09/baltimore-medical-waste-incinerator-still-pollutes-burning-trash-from-as-far-away-as-florida/>

⁶ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969724069997>

⁷ <https://dbknews.com/2021/02/23/environmental-racism-brandywine-coronavirus-power-plants/>

⁸ <https://grist.org/justice/in-maryland-one-community-is-taking-a-stand-against-environmental-racism/>

⁹ https://phys.org/news/2022-11-maryland-sites-polluting-coal-ash.html#google_vignette

and public marches and rallies by citizens to get the attention of the Maryland Department of the Environment.

For all of these Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility strongly supports SB978. Environmental and Racial Injustice are important causes of health disparities. SB978 is an attempt to address this and that is why we support this bill.

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