



TESTIMONY FOR SB0978

Environmental Permits – Requirements for Public Participation and Impact and Burden Analysis (Cumulative Harms to Environmental Restoration for Improving Shared-Health – CHERISH Our Communities Act

Bill Sponsor: Senator Lam

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Cecilia Plante, co-chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in strong support of SB0978 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

For decades, decisions made by the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) have been made without public participation, and made with the intent to facilitate the building of infrastructure rather than what was necessary for the public good. What those policies have left us with are areas of that state that are toxic to the residents who live there and never had a voice.

The CHERISH Act would realign the goals of MDE to ensure that the infrastructure we do build (and renew permits for) would have safeguards for the residents of the state. It would require –

- Any new permit applications to include an Environmental Impact Statement and Existing Burden Report
- MDE to conduct a public notice and review process for these permits
- MDE to prepare a final Existing Burden Report based on public comment and input from stakeholders including the Maryland Department of Health and local elected officials
- MDE to determine whether issuing a permit would cause an increased potential for adverse impacts on the community. If it will:
 - for new or expanded permits: MDE will deny the permit application unless it meets an essential need for the impacted community for which there is no alternative.
 - for renewal permits: if it issues the permit, MDE will require additional permit conditions to protect public health, and the applicant will enter into a Cumulative Impacts Mitigation Fund Agreement with the impacted community

- MDE to make information about enforcement actions against permitted facilities in covered areas easily available online, and direct 25% of penalties from enforcement actions to the impacted communities

Our members look forward to having our primary environmental watchdog support the public needs in this manner. We strongly support this bill and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.