

## Testimony Supporting SB0978

### **CHERISH Our Communities Act: Cumulative Harms to Environmental Restoration for Improving our Shared Health**

**Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
February 25, 2025**

#### **Position: SUPPORT**

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee,

The undersigned 38 community, climate, and environmental organizations and elected officials urge you to support **SB0978 (from Cumulative Harms to Environmental Restoration for Improving Shared Health - the CHERISH Our Communities Act)**. This important public health legislation will fill a critical gap in Maryland's ability to protect communities overburdened by pollution.

SB0978 will provide the Maryland Department of the Environment with critical tools to ensure that polluting facilities aren't increasingly concentrated in communities in Maryland already overburdened by pollution. SB0978 specifically covers communities in and immediately around census tracts with an environmental justice score of 75 or above, according to the Maryland Department of the Environment's EJ Screening Tool. Having this score means that a community is in the top 25% most polluted and most underserved census tracts in the state. Accordingly the state should design its permitting process to consider the existing pollution in communities with a high EJ score before siting another facility there that may add to and worsen the disproportionate burden of pollution on the community. This is similar to a preventive care visit at a doctor's office. We need to assess what's currently going on before recommending the next course of action.

For proposed projects within these specific geographic areas, SB0978 calls for extra information from the permit applicant in the form of an Environmental Impact Statement and Existing Burden Report, and calls the Maryland Department of the Environment to consider whether the project will increase the pollution burden on the surrounding community as part of their review process. If it will, SB0978 outlines steps for the MDE to take to protect the community and for continuing community benefits to address the harm of pollution.

SB0978, together with its companion bill HB1406 addressing polluting energy-generating facilities, represents the culmination of years of community-led coordination in assessing cumulative impacts of pollution. As states like New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, and Minnesota have passed legislation to address cumulative impacts in the past five years, Maryland cannot afford for its protections for overburdened communities to fall farther behind.

Please pass the CHERISH Our Communities Act to ensure that frontline communities in Maryland gain these critical protections in 2025.

Sincerely,

**Mid-Atlantic Justice Coalition**

Walkiria Pool, Co-Anchor

**Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments (ANHE)**

Katie Huffling, DNP, RN, CNM, FAAN,  
Executive Director

**Concerned Citizens Against Industrial CAFOS (CCAIC)**

Gabby Ross, Founder

**Chesapeake Bay Foundation**

Matt Stegman, Maryland Staff Attorney

**Interfaith Power & Light (DC.MD.NoVa)**

Andrea Orozco, Faithful Advocacy Lead

**Greater Baybrook Alliance**

Meredith Chaiken, CEO

**Maryland League of Conservation Voters**

Rebecca Rehr, Director, Climate Policy &  
Justice

**Community Development Network of Maryland**

Claudia Wilson Randall, Executive Director

**Namati**

Jay Monteverde, Senior Advisor, US  
Environmental and Economic Justice  
Program

**Sussex Health & Environmental Network/  
Sentinels of Eastern Shore Health**

Maria Payan, Executive Director

**Baltimore City Council District 10**

Phylicia Porter, Councilwoman

**Clean Water Action**

Jennifer Kunze, Maryland Organizing  
Director

**Baltimore Green Space**

Katherine Lautar, Executive Director

**Climate Communications Coalition**

Sonia Demiray, Executive Director

**Maryland Latinos Unidos**

Carlos Orbe, Jr, Communications and  
Public Affairs Specialist

**Our Zero Waste Future**

Dante Davidson-Swinton, Executive  
Director

**Young, Gifted & Green**

LaTricea Adams, Founder CEO and  
President

**Maryland Legislative Coalition - Climate Justice Wing**

Dave Arndt, CoChair

**Green Dharma**

Anjali Gulati, Green Dharma Organizer -  
Interfaith Power & Light (DC.MD.NoVA)

**Environmental Justice Maryland**

Zack Buster, Founder & Executive Director

**Chesapeake Climate Action Network  
(CCAN) Action Fund**

Brittany Baker, Maryland Director

**Defensores de la Cuenca**

Abel Olivo, Executive Director

**Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility**

Gwen L. DuBois MD, MPH, President

**Coal Kills Baltimore**

John Scheinman, Terrel Askew, Olivia Yates, Evelyn Hoon, Co-Founders

**350.org**

Taylor Smith-Hams, US Senior Organizer

**Gwynns Falls Community Association**

Christopher Schulze, President

**Baltimore Tree Trust**

Shannon R Smith, Nursery Manager

**Indivisible HoCoMD Environmental Action**

Peter Alexander, Co-Facilitator

**Northeast Catholic Community**

Nancy Assero, Chair: Peace and Justice Committee

**Beaverdam Creek Watershed Watch Group**

Tom Taylor, Co-Chair

**Whitelock Community Farm**

Jennifer West, Executive Director

**Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home**

Bob Simon, Member, Organizing Committee

**Coal Free Curtis Bay**

Andrew Hinz, Volunteer

**Panic Problem**

Tom Gilhuley, President

**ShoreRivers**

Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper

**Out For Justice**

Trina Seldon, Executive Director

**National Aquarium**

Maggie Ostdahl, Senior Conservation Policy Manager

**Earthjustice**

Rachel Rintelmann, Managing Attorney, Community Partnerships Program