



SB0978 - SUPPORT  
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## SB0978, CHERISH Our Communities Act

Meeting of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

February 25, 2025

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee, on behalf of Elders Climate Action Maryland, I urge a favorable report on SB

Elders Climate Action is a nationwide organization devoted to ensuring that our children, grandchildren, and future generations have a world in which they can thrive. The Maryland Chapter has members across the state.

Climate change is the main focus of our work, but we recognize air pollution as one the greatest threats to our health. Also, climate change and air pollution share root causes.

Air pollution and its deadly effects are not evenly distributed. Many communities face much higher burdens. Those communities are disproportionately underserved and have more vulnerable populations. Currently the Maryland Department of the Environment lacks the legal authority to make permitting decisions based on environmental justice data and cumulative impacts.

The CHERISH Our Communities Act (Cumulative Harms to Environmental Restoration for Improving Our Shared Health) is well named. It will address a critical gap in Maryland's environmental protection system by requiring MDE to consider cumulative impacts on communities when they make decisions on new permits.

The CHERISH Act also requires meaningful community engagement for all major pollution permits. MDE may reject a permit because of the impacts or it may require strong conditions to reduce pollution and community benefits agreements.

New Jersey, New York and Minnesota have already made similar changes in their permitting system. Maryland should join these states as a leader for environmental justice and protect our vulnerable communities from further harm.

We strongly urge a favorable report on SB0978.

Thank you.