



FAVORABLE Testimony for 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)**

Senate - Education, Energy, and Environment Committee

February 28th, 2025

Dear Honorable Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee,

Maryland Climate Partners is pleased to offer **favorable testimony in support of SB 978, Cumulative Harms to Environmental Restoration for Improving Shared Health - CHERISH Our Communities Act**. Maryland Climate Partners is a coalition of over one hundred environmental, faith, consumer advocacy and social justice organizations focused on ensuring equitable implementation of the Climate Solutions Now Act (CSNA).

The CHERISH Our Communities Act is a community-driven environmental justice initiative that seeks protections for the most overburdened and underserved communities in the state of Maryland. CSNA codified the definitions of “overburdened” and “underserved” communities, and this bill further activates and implements those definitions to prevent further harm in communities that are already hosting a concentration of polluting facilities.

In the transition to a net-zero state as imposed by CSNA, Maryland has the opportunity to accelerate emissions reductions in the cities and neighborhoods that deserve it the most – those most overburdened. SB 978 proposes reasonable and important considerations for permits in any community with an environmental justice (EJ) score in the upper 75th percentile in the state and the surrounding 1.5 miles.

The CHERISH Act does two critical things: 1) allows MDE to reject or alter environmental permits based on an analysis triggered by a high EJ score, which is based on current pollution levels, community health, and the demographics of a community; and 2) requires facilities that are granted permits to establish a Cumulative Impacts Mitigation Fund Agreement aimed at addressing health issues the facility will cause.

People living in highly polluted areas should not have to worry about more polluting facilities opening and operating in their communities. Therefore, the ability for a permit to be denied or altered based on the living history of pollution and who lives there is a critical next step to improving the quality of life for residents in Maryland's polluted communities. For these reasons, Maryland Climate Partners urges a favorable report.