

**Testimony Supporting SB0978**  
**Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee**  
**February 25, 2025**

**Position: SUPPORT**

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee,

As a resident of Baltimore City and a person of faith concerned about public health, I am writing to express my strong support of SB0978, the CHERISH Our Communities Act.

The CHERISH Our Communities Act will address the disproportionate environmental and public health harms that environmental justice communities in Maryland face from pollution generating facilities. For centuries, these facilities have been disproportionately and deliberately sited in minority and economically distressed communities in Maryland. Low-wealth, Black, and other communities of color in Maryland [face greater cancer risks and exposure to air toxins](#) due to higher pollution burden.

The CHERISH Our Communities Act amends Maryland's environmental law to provide adequate environmental impact assessment and opportunities for public participation for new, renewed, and expanded environmental permits that are issued by the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE). Currently, many environmental permit applications do not even include a public engagement process, and do not take into consideration the cumulative harms posed by multiple and historic sources of pollution. The CHERISH Act prioritizes Maryland residents' well-being and ensures that MDE's decision-making processes are transparent and inclusive.

I see the BRESCO incinerator smokestack from my bedroom window, and I know that just a couple of miles away the residents of Curtis Bay and other South Baltimore communities have been facing much worse air quality than I do from the CSX terminal and other industrial sites in their neighborhoods for decades. It is not sufficient to consider environmental and health impacts of each project individually; we must account for cumulative impacts that keep children home from school due to asthma, that cause elevated cancer and respiratory disease rates, and that reduce communities' quality and length of life.

As Maryland confronts an energy crisis, we can and must make sure we do not increase pollution on already-overburdened communities. SB0978 is a necessary and timely bill to protect the most polluted communities in Maryland from more pollution. Please pass it in 2025, and you will save lives.

Regards,  
Katie Little  
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