

February 21, 2025

Subject: Testimony in **support of 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**)

Position: **Favorable**

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

I am submitting testimony in support of SB978, the CHERISH Our Communities Act. This legislation will add requirements in the Maryland Department of Environment (MDE) permitting system to better protect communities that already have heavy pollution burdens.

The bill will require the Public Service Commission to consider whether any proposed project will increase the pollution burden on the surrounding community as part of the review process. Provisions in the bill for an Environmental Impact Statement and Existing Burden Report will help ensure transparency, opportunity for community input, and fair and just treatment for impacted communities.

Minority and underserved communities in Maryland are exposed to a much heavier pollution burden than other communities. Under the CHERISH Our Communities Act, the Environmental Justice (EJ) Scores calculated by the Maryland Department of Environment will be used to identify the most polluted communities in the state.

For specific polluting facilities applying for permits in or near these most polluted communities, the Act will put in place requirements in the permitting process that will significantly protect underserved neighborhoods that have endured far more than their fair share of negative environmental impacts, and that have experienced harm to their health and quality of life as a result.

This is an environmental justice action that is long overdue. I strongly urge your support of this legislation.

Please give a favorable report on SB978.

Sincerely,

Tom Taylor
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