



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 County, a Senior Advisor at Namati — which is a founding member of the Mid-Atlantic Justice Coalition, and someone deeply concerned about environmental justice and concentration of pollution in certain neighborhoods, I am writing to express my strong support of SB978, 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 toxics](#) due to higher pollution burden.

I live just a couple miles away from one of Baltimore County's residential trash collection points on Warren Rd., and when the wind blows in certain directions, the air is putrid throughout my area. Neighborhoods with the top 25% EJ scores — as this bill focuses on — are surrounded by multiple polluting facilities and have been forced to live with compounded pollution impacts for decades. When facilities apply for permits that would continue or increase pollution in communities already burdened with so much, there should absolutely be an analysis of the combined impacts.

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.

SB978 represents a targeted approach, based on priorities identified by environmental justice communities in Maryland. Residents and constituents across Maryland need the state to fill this critical gap in MDE's current permitting authority to protect public health in Maryland's most polluted communities.

Thank you,
Jay Monteverde