



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

**Position: FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee,

Clean Water Action urges you to issue a favorable report on SB0978 (from Cumulative Harms to Environmental Restoration for Improving Shared Health - the CHERISH Our Communities Act). This important legislation will provide important, targeted environmental health protections for the communities in Maryland most overburdened by pollution.

SB978 is environmental justice legislation developed and driven by frontline communities in Maryland. This bill identifies polluting facilities of greatest concern to frontline communities in Maryland, and the permits relevant to their pollution. The bill applies specifically to covered permits for covered facilities proposed to be sited in or near communities in Maryland already overburdened by pollution according to MDE's EJ Screen. For such projects, a permit applicant will be required to include an initial Environmental Impact Analysis, detailing the potential impacts of the facility, and an initial Existing Burden Report, describing the current public health and environmental conditions in the surrounding communities. After public review, the Maryland Department of the Environment will finalize these reports and use them to determine whether issuing the proposed permit would add to the disproportionate pollution burden in already-overburdened communities. If it would, the Maryland Department of the Environment would ensure that the community is protected: either by denying the permit, or by ensuring that the community is better protected through additional conditions to protect public health and a Cumulative Impacts Mitigation Fund Agreement.

SB0978 is a commonsense, targeted bill that, together with HB1406 addressing Certificates of Public Convenience and Necessity for polluting energy-generating facilities, would enshrine essential protections to ensure that communities in Maryland already facing a disproportionate burden of pollution do not see that burden worsened and increased. This bill is both the result of years and decades of organizing and advocacy among communities in Maryland overburdened by pollution, and reflective of lessons learned from successful bills passed in states like New Jersey, Minnesota, Connecticut, and New York. Please issue a favorable report on SB0978 so that communities on the front lines of pollution in Maryland can gain these critical protections.

Thank you,

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