



Committee: Education, Energy and the Environment

Testimony: SB 978 - Environmental Permits - Requirements for Public Participation and Impact and Burden Analyses (Cumulative Harms to Environmental Restoration for Improving Shared Health - CHERISH Our Communities Act)

Organization: The Jewish Community Relations Council of Howard County, MD

Submitting: Betsy Singer

Position: FAVORABLE

Hearing Date: February 25, 2025

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

Our Jewish values compel us to act to repair the world (*tikkun olam*), which is a guiding principle of our Jewish faith. We act to prevent massive changes to Earth's climate as we face rising temperatures due to burning fossil fuels that trap greenhouse gases in the Earth's atmosphere. Floods, fires, and drought threaten the lives and livelihoods of Marylanders and people all over the U.S. and other nations of the world.

Today, extreme weather events are driving up costs for Marylanders and contributing to the state budget crisis. Nearly every jurisdiction across the state is affected by climate-related costs, all of which are currently borne by Maryland taxpayers. Insufficient oversight has led to polluting industries and facilities being clustered in specific areas that overexpose underserved populations and natural habitats to pollution.

This legislation will give the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) the authority to approve, alter, or deny a permit based on an Environmental Justice Score, and an assessment of other permits and the underlying socio-demographic characteristics of the community. This bill will apply new permitting requirements to a list of facilities and permit types of greatest concern to overburdened communities across Maryland. If a permit would increase the burden of pollution on an overburdened community, it would not be granted without meaningful conditions imposed and a meaningful Community Benefits Agreement. The CHERISH Act is in direct agreement with environmental justice goals set forth in Maryland's Climate Pollution Reduction plan and in MDE's recent Climate Implementation Pla

For these reasons, we strongly support SB 978 and urge a favorable report on in committee.