



Hearing before the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Maryland General Assembly
February 25, 2025

**Statement of Support (FAVORABLE)
of Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home for
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)**

Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home (MCCH) is a lay-led organization of Catholics from parishes in the three Catholic dioceses in Maryland: the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington. It engages in education about, and advocacy based upon, the teachings of the Catholic Church relating to care for creation and respect for all life. MCCH is a grassroots voice for the understanding of Catholic social teaching held by a wide array of Maryland Catholics. In the 2024 Legislative Session, 570 Maryland Catholics from 22 different Catholic parishes and religious communities across the State joined together through MCCH to support several key environmental bills under consideration by the General Assembly. MCCH is independent, though, and should be distinguished as an organization from the Maryland Catholic Conference, which represents the public policy positions of the bishops who lead these three dioceses.

Because we are attuned both to the cry of a distressed Earth and the cry of the poor who suffer first and foremost from environmental pollution, including a warming planet, **MCCH would like to express our strong support for Senate Bill 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).**

From our faith perspective this is an important bill. In his 2015 encyclical, entitled *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*,¹ Pope Francis called for a comprehensive response to protecting God's creation—one that addresses, simultaneously, two related crises: (1) the widespread despoliation of our environment (our air, water, and soils that sustain all life) by human activities; and (2) the disproportionate impact on the poor of environmental and climate collapse. The CHERISH Our Communities Act addresses both crises in an integrated fashion. It does so by focusing attention and action on the excessive and unequal environmental and public health harms that environmental justice communities in Maryland face from pollution-generating facilities. Historically, these facilities have been disproportionately and deliberately sited in minority and economically distressed communities in

¹ The English text of the encyclical, to which the paragraph numbers in the following parentheses refer, can be found at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

Maryland. As a result, low-wealth, Black, and other communities of color in Maryland have faced (and continue to face) greater cancer risks and exposure to air toxics, due to the higher pollution burden imposed by these facilities.

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 harm posed by multiple, historical sources of pollution. The CHERISH Our Communities Act will give higher priority to the well-being of Maryland residents in environmental justice communities and will ensure that MDE's decision-making processes are transparent and inclusive.

To our mind, the CHERISH Our Communities Act speaks to the essence of how we treat and value one another—as human beings and as part of nature—with the respect and dignity that each deserves. Pope Francis has written in *Laudato Si'* that “everything is connected” and “concern for the environment thus needs to be joined in a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society. A sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion, and concern for our fellow human beings” (no. 91).

For these reasons we strongly urge your support for this bill. Thank you for your consideration of our views and our respectful request for a **favorable** report on Senate Bill 978, the CHERISH Our Communities Act.