

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

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Michael Middleton, and I serve as the Executive Director of the SB7 Coalition, representing the communities of Curtis Bay, Cherry Hill, Mt. Winans, Westport, Lakeland, Brooklyn, and the Baltimore Peninsula. I am writing to express my strong support for SB978, the CHERISH Our Communities Act.

For too long, the residents of South Baltimore have lived with the consequences of environmental injustice. Our communities have faced the compounding effects of pollution from industrial facilities that have been historically and disproportionately sited in our neighborhoods. The cumulative impact of these polluting sources has resulted in unacceptable health burdens, including elevated rates of respiratory disease, cardiovascular conditions, and cancer. Entire communities have been displaced because there has never been a law like the CHERISH Act—one that requires the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) to factor in the existing pollution burden before making permitting decisions. This legislation is essential to ensuring that the health and well-being of our communities are considered in the environmental decision-making process.

At SB7, we have demonstrated what is possible when communities have a seat at the table and are empowered to shape development in a way that reduces harm and shares benefits. The Baltimore Peninsula project is proof of this concept—it is a model of collaborative problem-solving where the success of a development is directly shared with its neighboring communities. These resources help address longstanding needs, including youth opportunities, public safety, food access, and education. This is not charity—it is a strategic approach to building a healthier and more sustainable future for families who live, work, and play in South Baltimore.

The CHERISH Act is about fairness, accountability, and ensuring that environmental justice communities have a voice in decisions that directly impact their health and future. Community governance and direct on-the-ground accountability are critical to making sure that promises made are promises kept. We cannot afford to continue the cycle of pollution and displacement—our communities deserve better, and this bill is a crucial step toward long-overdue protections.

I urge you to support SB978 and stand with the residents of South Baltimore in the fight for environmental justice. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Michael Middleton
Executive Director, SB7 Coalition