



SB0978

**Cumulative Harms to Environmental Restoration for Improving Shared Health
(CHERISH Our Communities Act)**

Testimony before Education, Energy, and the Environment

Hearing February 25, 2025

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Feldman and Co-Chair Kagan, and members of the committee, my name is Virginia Smith, and I represent the 900+ members of Indivisible Howard County. Indivisible Howard County is an active member of the Maryland Legislative Coalition (with 30,000+ members). We are providing written testimony today **in support of SB0978**, which addresses the critical need for environmental justice in the state by creating new permitting requirements, requiring better community engagement and public notices, and ensuring permits are only given when there are strong conditions to reduce pollution impacts in overburdened communities and there are community benefits agreements that support local residents. We thank Senator Lam for sponsoring this bill.

Currently, when a new permit to pollute is considered, Maryland only evaluates how that permit will impact a community, instead of evaluating how it will work with other sources of pollution already allowed. This isolation means that overburdened communities are created where residents face multiple sources of pollution. It has also been found that many high-impact facilities are avoiding public health notice requirements and transparency measures. This leaves neighborhoods and communities ill-prepared to fight back when they may be impacted by new sources of pollution. Finally, Maryland does not currently have the legal authority to make permitting decisions based on environmental justice data, which means that over-burdened communities will continue to be over-burdened.

The CHERISH act will address these issues and put Maryland at the forefront of environmental justice reform by addressing the combined effects of multiple polluters on community health. It will ensure that communities already dealing with pollution burdens aren't forced to accept more without safeguards and benefits. And most important, it will give Maryland the power it needs to use environmental justice data when considering permits.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

We respectfully urge a favorable report.

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