

Testimony Supporting SB0978

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee February 25, 2025

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee,

As a resident of Baltimore City (zip code: 21231), a cancer epidemiology master's student at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, and a research volunteer at the National Cancer Institute for the Environmental and Epidemiology Branch, I am writing to express my strong support of SB978, the CHERISH Our Communities Act.

Both as a Baltimore resident and a scientist dedicated to understanding the health impacts of industrial pollution, I have seen firsthand how polluting factories, fossil fuel shipment facilities, trash incinerators, and landfills harm our communities. My research in cancer epidemiology and environmental justice has deepened my understanding of how hazardous air pollutants—like benzene, formaldehyde, and particulate matter—contribute to respiratory diseases, cardiovascular conditions, and cancer at disproportionate rates. But beyond the data, I know these are not just abstract risks. They are daily realities for families in neighborhoods like Curtis Bay, Cherry Hill, and my own community in Baltimore.

I spend my days analyzing how toxic emissions affect human health, mapping exposure risks, and studying how environmental injustices persist. My work also involves learning about chemical mixtures and cumulative risk assessment methods, which are essential tools in evaluating the combined effects of multiple environmental hazards. These approaches, along with community engagement, are critical in understanding the full cumulative burdens that disproportionately impact historically marginalized populations.

However, no amount of research will fix this problem unless we take action. That is why I strongly support SB978, the CHERISH Our Communities Act. Maryland's current environmental permitting system fails to account for the cumulative burden of pollution on environmental justice communities and often shuts residents out of the decision-making process. This bill would require a more just and transparent approach—one that considers the full impact of new and expanding industrial facilities and ensures that affected communities have a voice.

Environmental justice is not just a policy issue; it is a matter of public health, dignity, and human rights. No one should have to fight for clean air, but in Baltimore, that fight has been necessary for far too long. It is time for Maryland to take a stand and protect the health of its most vulnerable residents. I urge you to support SB978 and take a critical step toward environmental equity in our state.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Sharp