



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education*

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)

Date: February 25, 2025
To: Education, Energy, & Environment Committee

Position: **FAVORABLE**
From: Gussie Maguire,
MD Staff Scientist

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** SB 978, which requires permit applicants to the Department of the Environment to include an environmental impact analysis with their application if the project may have an increased potential for environmental and human health impacts. Applicants for projects located within 1.5 miles of at-risk census tracts at or above the 75th percentile EJ Score must also submit an existing burden report, detailing health and environmental stressors already affecting nearby communities.

Applications for permits that would worsen those stressors could only be approved if there were no reasonable alternative, and if more stringent permit conditions were applied and a mitigation fund agreement established with the impacted communities. Finally, the bill would strengthen public notice requirements by requiring the Department to post information about violations and enforcement actions on permitted facilities near at-risk census tracts.

This bill responds to historic inequities, where poor communities, often communities of color, have been forced to share space with disproportionate numbers of industrial facilities, landfills, incinerators, power plants, and other pollution sources. Overburdened communities face health impacts as well as damage and lack of safe access to natural spaces. Emissions and discharges from multiple facilities within a single watershed place undue stress on the waterway and its surroundings. Requiring an analysis of the environmental and health burdens already impacting an area will help the Department of the Environment make informed decisions about where it can responsibly allow for additional permitted discharges, emissions, and other industrial impacts.

CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on SB 978.

For more information, please contact Matt Stegman, Maryland Staff Attorney, at mstegman@cbf.org.

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The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) is a non-profit environmental education and advocacy organization dedicated to the restoration and protection of the Chesapeake Bay. With over 200,000 members and e-subscribers, including 71,000 in Maryland alone, CBF works to educate the public and to protect the interest of the Chesapeake and its resources.