



Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Testimony on: SB0978 – CHERISH Our Communities Act
Organization: Maryland Legislative Coalition Climate Justice Wing
Submitting: Laurie McGilvray, Co-Chair
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 25, 2024

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing our testimony today on SB978. The Maryland Legislative Coalition (MLC) Climate Justice Wing, a statewide coalition of nearly 30 grassroots and professional organizations urges you to vote favorably on SB978.

The CHERISH Our Communities Act addresses the disproportionate environmental and public health harms that environmental justice communities in Maryland historically have and currently are facing from facilities like incinerators, fossil fuel power plants, manufacturing plants, and landfills. The bill 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).

SB0978 specifically covers communities in and immediately around census tracts with an environmental justice score of 75 or above, according to the MDE's EJ Screening Tool. A higher score indicates communities with higher exposure to pollutants combined with sensitive populations and underserved demographics. When a project requiring an MDE permit is proposed for these areas, extra information is required from the permit applicant in the form of an Environmental Impact Statement and Existing Burden Report. MDE must consider whether the project will increase the pollution burden on the surrounding community as part of their review process. If MDE determines the project would cause or contribute to an increased potential for adverse community environmental and public health impacts in an at-risk census tract, then it must deny the permit or include conditions under certain circumstances.

Maryland communities that have suffered from an undue and disproportionate burden of pollution should not have to endure further injury from new, expanded, or renewed permitted projects. SB978 provides a thoughtful process to avoid future harm. For these reasons, the MLC Climate Justice Wing respectfully urges a **FAVORABLE** report in Committee.

350MoCo
Adat Shalom Climate Action
Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church Environmental Justice Ministry

Chesapeake Earth Holders
Climate Parents of Prince George's
Climate Reality Project
ClimateXChange – Rebuild Maryland Coalition
Coming Clean Network, Union of Concerned Scientists
DoTheMostGood Montgomery County
Echotopia
Elders Climate Action
Fix Maryland Rail
Glen Echo Heights Mobilization
Greenbelt Climate Action Network
HoCoClimateAction
IndivisibleHoCoMD
Maryland Legislative Coalition
Mobilize Frederick
Montgomery County Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions
Montgomery Countryside Alliance
Mountain Maryland Movement
Nuclear Information & Resource Service
Progressive Maryland
Safe & Healthy Playing Fields
Takoma Park Mobilization Environment Committee
The Climate Mobilization MoCo Chapter
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland
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