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Testimony Supporting [HB1484](#)
Environment and Transportation Committee
March 11, 2025

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chair Korman and Members of the Committee,

As a nurse concerned about the high rates of infant and maternal mortality in environmental justice communities in our state, I am writing to express my strong support for HB1484, the CHERISH Our Communities Act.

The CHERISH Our Communities Act will address the disproportionately high environmental health harms that environmental justice communities in Maryland face from pollution-generating facilities. For too many years, facilities such as BRESCO Trash Incinerator, CSX Terminal, Patapsco Wastewater Treatment, Curtis Bay Energy Medical Waste Incinerator, and a variety of other polluting industries have been disproportionately and deliberately sited in minority and economically distressed communities in Maryland. Low-wealth, Black, and other communities of color in Maryland face greater cancer risks and exposure to air pollution, and high rates of maternal mortality and infant health problems, due to a higher pollution burden.ⁱ Maternal/infant health is also negatively impacted.

As a former labor and deliver nurse, and previously the National Coordinator for The Collaborative on Health and the Environment's Reproductive Health Working Group, I know that contamination from these industrial sources, especially air pollution, is extremely toxic to pregnant people and babies.

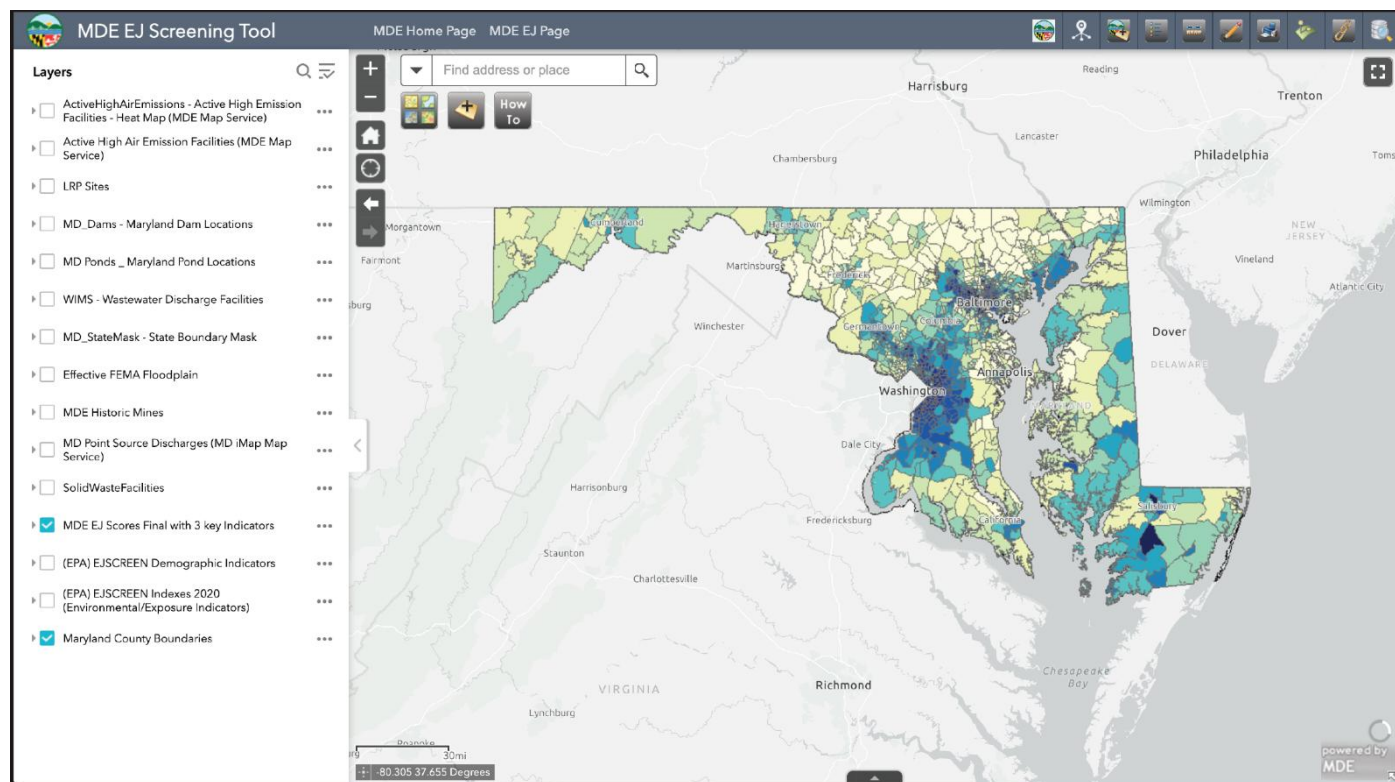
Epidemiological research over decades has consistently demonstrated serious adverse effects from air pollution. The increased vulnerability of pregnant people and babies to air pollutants and the epidemiological evidence linking air pollution to adverse maternal and infant health effects is strong. Harmful health effects include maternal hypertension, postpartum depression, placental abruption, low birth weight, preterm birth, infant mortality, and adverse lung and respiratory effects.ⁱⁱ

In addition, the cumulative impacts of various types of air pollution combine for even more harmful health outcomes than single pollutants alone. The categories of toxicants commonly emitted from the types of companies targeted by this bill include particulate matter

(PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀) in the form of hydrocarbons, and metals such as lead (Pb), manganese (Mn), mercury (Hg), aluminum (Al), and cadmium (Cd), as well as halogens and organohalogenes.^{iii, iv} These cumulative impacts are best addressed with an Environmental Impact Statement and an Existing Burden Report. Exposures during pregnancy and infancy greatly affect human health because these are sensitive periods of growth and development. Fetuses are particularly susceptible to environmental toxicants because of their immature organ systems.

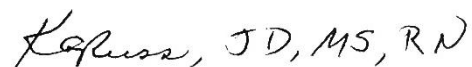
Many serious public health problems in Maryland can be associated with prenatal exposures to toxic substance emitted by industries in environmental justice communities. Baltimore City has a preterm birth rate of 12.1% of all births, as compared to 10.2% in the state as a whole.^v The infant mortality rate among babies born to Black birthing people is 1.6 times the state rate for all races and ethnicities.^{vi} The maternal mortality rate in Maryland for non-Hispanic Black individuals was 40.4 deaths per 100,000 live births, as compared to the US maternal mortality rate of 32.9 deaths per 100,000 live births, in 2021.^{vii} Maryland's environmental justice communities suffer disproportionately from pollutants and their serious health effects.

HB1484 identifies the 25% most polluted communities in the state by using the Maryland EJ Screening Tool, as illustrated below, and aims to protect them from toxic industrial emissions.



This bill requires companies and other entities that pollute to include an Environmental Impact Statement and an Existing Burden Report when submitting an MDE permit application. MDE will determine whether issuing the permit would cause an increased potential for adverse impacts on the community. This targeted approach, based on priorities self-identified by environmental justice communities, fills a critical gap in MDE's current permitting authority and better protects public health in Maryland's most polluted communities.

For all these reasons, I strongly urge the committee to vote in favor of HB1484. The CHERISH bill will provide comprehensive environmental health assessments for Maryland's environmental justice communities, better protect our vulnerable children and pregnant people, and has the potential to lower infant and maternal mortality rates in the state.^{ix}



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ⁱ [Socioeconomic and Racial Disparities in Cancer Risk from Air Toxics in Maryland - PMC](#).

ⁱⁱ Juan Aguilera, Katherine Konvinse, Alexandra Lee, Holden Maecker, Mary Prunicki, Shruthi Mahalingaiah, Vanitha Sampath, Paul J. Utz, Emily Yang, Kari C. Nadeau, Air pollution and pregnancy, *Seminars in Perinatology*, Volume 47, Issue 8, 2023, 151838, ISSN 0146-0005, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.semperi.2023.151838>.

ⁱⁱⁱ [Perinatal and Childhood Exposure to Cadmium, Manganese, and Metal Mixtures and Effects on Cognition and Behavior: A Review of Recent Literature - PMC](#)

^{iv} [Organohalogen Pollutants and Human Health | Science Inventory | US EPA](#).

^v [2024 March Of Dimes Report Card For Maryland | PeriStats | March of Dimes](#)

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} [2021 MMR Report.pdf](#), p. 9.

^{viii} [MDE EJ Screening Tool](#) (archived).

^{ix} Ian R. Trees, Abhisek Saha, Diane L. Putnick, Priscilla K. Clayton, Pauline Mendola, Erin M. Bell, Rajeshwari Sundaram, Edwina H. Yeung, Prenatal exposure to air pollutant mixtures and birthweight in the upstate KIDS cohort, *Environment International*, Volume 187, 2024, 108692, ISSN 0160-4120, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envint.2024.108692>.