JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY | Climate & Sustainability

Testimony Supporting HB1484
House Environment and Transportation Committee
March 11, 2025

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chair Korman and Members of the Committee,

As co-chairs of the **Environmental Justice and Community Partnerships (EJCP) Committee** of the Sustainability Leadership Council (SLC) at Johns Hopkins University (JHU), and as residents of Maryland, we write to express our strong support of HB1484, the CHERISH Our Communities Act.

The EJCP Committee serves in a leadership, convening, and guidance capacity for university-wide academic, research, and operational activities that can positively impact environmental justice through the depth and breadth of JHU's capacities and partnerships. Communities of color and low-income communities bear a disproportionate and adverse environmental and health burden from pollution. The current regulatory framework in Maryland considers the emission of environmental pollutants one permit at a time, in isolation, whereas residents of overburdened, low-income communities and communities of color experience the adverse environmental and health impacts from the totality of pollutant emissions across numerous permitted facilities. Foundational to the efforts of the EJCP Committee is a goal to improve understanding and identify opportunities to mitigate these cumulative impacts and disproportionate and adverse burdens on the health and the environment, locally in Baltimore, across our state, and worldwide. *Herein, we provide*:

1. Information about the EJCP Committee's positionality and role within JHU and its community partnerships;
2. Steps JHU has taken to understand and meaningfully integrate principles and practices of environmental justice in the promulgation of its new Climate Action & Sustainability Plan;
3. An example of how JHU has integrated the 17 Principles of Environmental Justice[1] into institutional, university-wide decision-making and operational practices; and
4. Examples of the EJCP's partnership work with overburdened communities and how they would benefit from the CHERISH Our Communities Act.

1) EJCP Committee at JHU:

Our support of the CHERISH Our Communities Act is informed by the EJCP's academic, research, policy, and operations work at JHU. Dr. Chris Heaney, Associate Professor of Environmental Health and Engineering, co-leader of the Community Engagement Core of the Center for Community Health: Addressing Regional Maryland Environmental Determinants of Disease (CHARMED), and Director of the Community Science and Innovation for Environmental Justice (CSI EJ) Initiative, leads research addressing community identified environmental health and justice concerns in South Baltimore and Maryland's eastern shore related to the cumulative burdens of air, land, and water pollution. Dr. Nicole Labruto is the faculty director of JHU's Medicine, Science, and the Humanities Program, and has long worked

as an academic advocate for community organizations seeking environmental justice on their terms. She works and teaches on environmental racism, food and land justice, and zero waste efforts. As the Director of Baltimore City Government and Community Affairs, Jennifer Mielke's responsibilities include building and strengthening the relationships of Johns Hopkins with external stakeholders such as neighborhood residents, policymakers, and business and community leaders, whose interest and support are vital to the mission of Johns Hopkins. The EJCP Committee is comprised of leaders from across JHU, including the Provost's Office, University Administration, Student Affairs, Office of Climate and Sustainability, Krieger School of Arts and Sciences, School of Education, School of Medicine, Whiting School of Engineering, and Bloomberg School of Public Health. The EJCP Committee aims to elevate cross-university engagement and community partnerships to address critical environmental justice issues in Baltimore, across Maryland, and worldwide.

2) Environmental justice as a priority of the Climate Action & Sustainability Plan:

As JHU planned and implemented a new Climate Action & Sustainability Plan [2], the importance of environmental justice and community engagement was evident at each step of the process. Throughout the planning process, community partners and stakeholders on the community advisory board (CAB) provided critical input on the priorities and perspectives of local residents and organizations and advocated for JHU to prioritize and meaningfully integrate the principles and practice of environmental justice into its academics, research, practice, and operations. EJ arose as a focal issue in terms of the JHU's impact in Baltimore – and led to a pledge of JHU's business support and organic wastes streams to support a local composting infrastructure in Baltimore with regional community partners that adheres to community and worker standards.

3) JHU Environmental Justice (EJ) Decision-Making Prompts:

The JHU EJ Prompts[3] are a set of considerations and actions based on the 17 Principles of Environmental Justice[1], drafted and adopted in 1991 at the National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit. These principles have guided the global environmental justice movement since they were released. The EJCP Committee used them as a template to create a set of EJ prompts that faculty and staff can use to guide research, operations, and community engagement decisions such that they take into consideration the political, economic and cultural involvement and wellbeing of all people potentially impacted by the university's projects and commitments. We encourage the State to consider these same principles of EJ as a foundational framework for its review of permits for environmental pollution emissions – by the totality of their impacts rather than individually – on overburdened communities.

4) Examples of EJCP Committee's partnerships that highlight the importance and benefits of adopting a cumulative impacts framework as outlined in the CHERISH Our Communities Act:

Cumulative Impacts in South Baltimore, Maryland

Dr. Heaney and members of the EJCP have partnered with the South Baltimore Community Land Trust (SBCLT), the Community of Curtis Bay Association (CCBA), and the South Baltimore 7 (SB7) Coalition to provide scientific and technical support that addresses their community-identified concerns with environmental pollution from roughly 70 facilities regulated by air pollutant permits from the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE).[4-6] These include a coal export terminal, solid waste incinerator, medical waste incinerator, wastewater treatment plant, municipal landfill, chemical manufacturing plant, oil and gas facilities, among others. The operating permits of these facilities are regulated individually rather than through a framework of their cumulative impacts that acknowledges the existing burden on community members. Our scientific and technical investigations with SBCLT have provided critical answers to community concerns about the presence of coal dust in their neighborhood[4], adverse impacts of diesel truck traffic on black carbon air pollution[6], the frequency of visible black smoke emissions from industrial fires[5] and the Curtis Bay medical waste incinerator, and overall community air pollution burden. Additionally, South Baltimore residents in partnership with members of the JHU community have documented several decades of industrial explosions, leaks, spills, and other disasters impacting quality of life and mental health in the area.[7] However, our efforts address the tip of the iceberg among the 70 facilities permitted to emit air pollutants in the community. The adoption of the CHERISH Our Communities Act would account for the existing environmental burden in South Baltimore, including facilities regulated not just for pollutant emissions to air, but also water and land. The EJCP Committee will continue to partner with South Baltimore communities to provide scientific and technical responses to the reality of their daily lived experiences with cumulative, disproportionate, and adverse impacts.

Cumulative impacts on Maryland's Eastern Shore

Since the mid-20th century, food animal production has shifted from smaller farms to the confined animal feeding operation (CAFO) model that concentrates animals and their waste in small areas, threatening air and water quality. The Eastern Shore of Maryland, including Eastern Shore counties in Delaware (DE) and Virginia (VA), are host to a plethora of poultry CAFOs and related infrastructure such as poultry processing plants, biofuel transition stations, and other waste-to-energy projects, which release pollutants to air, water, and land in the communities situated near these facilities. Almost 300,000,000 chickens from this agriculturally dense area were sold in 2017[8], generating large amounts of waste and other pollutants such as particulate matter (PM), ammonia and nitrogen that pollute the air, soil, and water of neighboring rural communities.[9-12] Large animal feeding operations (AFOs) produce the majority of these poultry products. The ~600+ large vertically-integrated industrial poultry operations in Sussex County, Delaware, produce approximately 200,000,000 chickens each year. In more recent years, the CAFO biogas industry has been hailed in the region as a "green" solution to the waste problems of the livestock agricultural industry. However, manure is converted to energy through the production of biomethane from manure digesters, further polluting the air and affecting health and quality of life of communities who live proximal to these facilities.[10] Health effects related to proximity to poultry CAFOs are one of the main concerns for the residents of the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Studies have found that proximity to more and larger poultry operations could increase the risk of community acquired pneumonia and is associated with reduced gestation

time and birth weight.[13-16] Air pollution from CAFOs has been recognized as an environmental and public health concern by the National Academy of Sciences[17], the US-Government Accountability Office (GAO)[18], and the Pew Commission on Industrial Food Animal Production[19], including a 2024 update on the state of knowledge by Merchant and Martin[20]. Although CAFO air pollution contributes to regional ammonia (NH_3) deposition and greenhouse gases emissions, fenceline neighbors in rural communities across the U.S. are most directly affected by harmful particles and gases emitted from storage and land application of animal waste and from confinement barns.[17] CAFO air emissions result in episodic exposures that affect neighbors because of their malodorant and irritant properties. Concerns of dispersion and dissemination of antimicrobial resistance arise from the common use of antimicrobial and arsenical drugs in swine and poultry CAFOs.[19] Further, there has been increased awareness of the cumulative impacts and adverse interactions between air pollution and respiratory infectious diseases, such as the COVID-19 pandemic's disproportionate and adverse impact on low income, vulnerable populations experiencing greater burden of air pollution.[21] The critical importance of accounting for cumulative impacts, including infectious diseases is further exemplified by the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on livestock industry workers[22] as well as the ongoing rise in concern with the H5N1 influenza A virus outbreak affecting poultry and other livestock industry workers. Biosecurity concerns with epidemic and pandemic pathogen reassortment and spillover between poultry and humans living at the fenceline in rural areas of Maryland's Eastern Shore would benefit from risk mitigation approaches that account for the cumulative and interactive effects between environmental, infectious, and other agents and stressors.

The distribution of the poultry industry across MD and DE disproportionately impacts low-income communities and communities of color, as CAFOs are located in counties with some of the lowest wealth in the state. Increases in median household income are associated with a reduction in the number of CAFOs nearby.[23,24] Recent permitting of poultry waste-to-energy sites in the Delmarva Peninsula has disproportionately impacted the Haitian Creole and Latinx populations who live in the communities most proximal to these facilities. In addition to CAFOs, residents of these communities now must contend with issues due to CAFO manure digestors and biogas. The process used in manure-to-energy conversion generates harmful air contaminants and perpetuates the expansion of legacy industrial livestock production practices and infrastructure that remains harmful to the environment and surrounding communities.[10] Our community partners at the Sentinels of Eastern Shore Health (SESH) and Sussex Health and Environmental Network (SHEN) have been requesting changes in Maryland state permitting to account for the *existing burden* and *cumulative impacts* of high density industrial livestock production in any new environmental permits or permit renewals. The CHERISH Our Communities Act would take critical steps towards mitigating the cumulative environmental burdens of our community partners on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

Cumulative Impacts in Govans, Baltimore City, Maryland

When a human crematory was proposed to be built in the dense, lower-income residential neighborhood, of Govans, the York Road Partnership, a community association that spans over 20 Baltimore City neighborhoods, took action. We researched the known public health impacts of human crematoria, circulated the information, and enlisted community members to take public action through hearing attendance, letter writing, and calls to elected officials. Dozens of letters

and several hearings against the issuing of the permit ended in frustration: in December 2024, the permit was granted despite vehement community desires for it to be denied. Residents now have no recourse to transparency for a facility that will emit lead, mercury, and other toxins. The CHERISH Our Communities Act would make sure that information is easily available when it impacts our neighborhood and our health.

As demonstrated by the above examples and Johns Hopkins University's continued commitment to the 17 Principles of Environmental Justice[1], we support the CHERISH Our Communities Act and encourage passage of this bill. The benefits of meaningful integration of these principles into institutional practices via the CHERISH Our Communities Act would promote the environment, health and safety of Maryland's most overburdened residents, in alignment with EJ goals in Maryland's Climate Pollution Reduction Plan[25] and MDE's Agency Climate Implementation Plan[26]. Building upon our longstanding partnerships with Maryland community-based organizations and state environmental regulatory agencies, we also commit to supporting–where possible–the implementation of the CHERISH Our Communities Act such as methodological recommendations for "Environmental Impact Statements" and "Existing Burden Reports." Through the CHERISH Our Communities Act, Maryland is presented with a key opportunity to be a national leader in advancing environmental justice and ensure improved equity, health, and quality of life for its residents.

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