



Good afternoon Members of the Maryland General Assembly,

I am submitting this testimony in favor of the CHERISH Act on behalf of the Center for Engagement, Environmental Justice, and Health INpowering Communities (CEEJH INC). Given the recent rollback of environmental justice protections under the new Executive Orders, it is now more important than ever for Maryland to codify a law to tackle the cumulative impacts (CIs) of pollution. According to the EPA, CIs are defined as the totality of exposures to combinations of chemical and nonchemical stressors and their effects on health, well-being, and quality of life outcomes.¹ These include both contemporary exposures, as well as historical stressors over the course of one's lifetime. The EPA's Interim Cumulative Impacts framework emphasized community participation and working collaboratively, ensuring that lived experiences guide the assessment and decision-making process.² It encourages participatory science, co-production of evidence, and integrating cultural knowledge. CIs are most often found in Black, Brown, and low-wealth communities, where overlapping threats like factory emissions, traffic pollution, and toxic landfills create a much greater risk.³ In Maryland, many communities face a barrage of pollution sources. In Cheverly alone, residents are surrounded by various polluting facilities, including: autobody shops, an Amazon warehouse distribution center, the Joseph Smith and Sons metal recycling facility, chemical manufacturing plants, and heavy truck routes surrounding residential areas.⁴ Pollution from all of these facilities combines with each other and compounds with other inequalities to produce more and worse health impacts.

Health disparities following sociodemographic lines related to disproportionate air pollution exposure have been well-documented in the state. In 2020, there were 16,615 asthma-related emergency department visits in Maryland (age-adjusted rate of 27.5 per 10,000 residents) and 1,478 asthma-related hospitalizations. Black children in Maryland have almost five times the rate of asthma-related emergency department visits as White children.⁵ A study by the University of Maryland Institute for Health Computing found that medical visits for heart problems rose by nearly 20% during six days in June 2023, when smoke from Western Canadian wildfires led to poor air quality in Baltimore and surrounding regions.⁶ These are areas already impacted by urban heat island effects, further revealing the importance of cumulative impact assessments prior to approving new or renewed permit applications. The linkage between air pollution and infant mortality has also been well-documented. A nationwide study found that a 1 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ reduction in coarse particulate matter (PM_{10}) could result in approximately 4-8 fewer infant deaths per 100,000 live births.⁷ In Maryland, racial disparities are evident, with non-Hispanic Black infants experiencing a mortality rate of 9.8 per 1,000 live births in 2021, compared to 3.7 for non-Hispanic White infants and 5.3 for Hispanic infants. Another study estimated that 6% of all-cause infant mortality, 16% of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) cases among normal birth weight infants, and 24% of respiratory disease mortality among normal birth weight infants could be attributed to PM_{10}

¹ EPA. (2024, November 21). Cumulative Impacts Explained.

<https://www.epa.gov/cumulative-impacts/cumulative-impacts-explained#:~:text=Cumulative%20Impacts%20are%20defined%20as,exposures%20throughout%20a%20person's%20lifetime.>

² EPA. (2024, December 4). Interim Framework for Advancing Consideration of Cumulative Impacts.

<https://www.epa.gov/cumulative-impacts/interim-framework-advancing-consideration-cumulative-impacts>

³ Bullard, R. D. (Ed.). (2007). Growing smarter: Achieving livable communities, environmental justice, and regional equity. MIT Press.

⁴ MDE. (2021, October 4). <https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/air/AirQualityCompliance/Documents/CheverlyStudy.pdf>. Maryland Department of the Environment.

⁵ Maryland Department of Health. (2023). Asthma. MDH.

[https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/OEHFP/EH/pages/asthma.aspx#:~:text=In%202020%2C%20there%20were%2016%2C615,million%2C%20totalling%20totalling%20\\$49.5%20million](https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/OEHFP/EH/pages/asthma.aspx#:~:text=In%202020%2C%20there%20were%2016%2C615,million%2C%20totalling%20totalling%20$49.5%20million)

⁶ Kotz, D. (2024, December 13). Exposure to remote wildfire smoke drifting across the U.S. linked to increased medical visits for heart and Lung Problems. University of Maryland School of Medicine.

<https://www.medschool.umaryland.edu/news/2024/exposure-to-remote-wildfire-smoke-drifting-across-the-us-linked-to-increased-medical-visits-for-heart-and-lung-problems.html>

⁷ Chay, K. Y., & Greenstone, M. (2003). The impact of air pollution on infant mortality: evidence from geographic variation in pollution shocks induced by a recession. *The quarterly journal of economics*, 118(3), 1121-1167.

levels above 12.0 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, further underscoring the importance of limiting polluting entities from entering already environmentally-burdened areas.⁸

Across the country in states ([New Jersey](#), [New York](#), [Minnesota](#), and [Colorado](#)) that have passed strong protection against pollution, successful laws began with community leadership. The Mid-Atlantic Justice Coalition (MAJC) — a coalition of impacted communities and seasoned advocates — is driving similar efforts in Maryland. MD EJSCREEN, for example, has been used to identify overburdened communities and prevent the incorporation of facilities such as busyard terminals into communities such as Cheverly, Fairmount Heights, and Seat Pleasant. Additionally, MD EJSCREEN identified environmentally-burdened communities, such as Turner Station in Dundalk, Maryland to receive funding from the 2022 EPA American Rescue Plan (ARP) for hyperlocal air quality monitoring efforts. CEEJH has been working with this community since receipt of funds to develop, maintain, and disseminate data from the network, and work with the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) to implement pollution mitigation strategies.⁹ When it was first developed, MD EJSCREEN found that Bladensburg had an EJ score of 0.99, when compared to the rest of Prince George's County, as well as a plethora of concrete block plants and autobody shops.¹⁰ The tool also identified MD EJSCREEN scores across environmental parameters ($\text{PM}_{2.5}$, Ozone, Traffic Proximity etc.) to be in the top 10th percentile for Langley Park when compared to the rest of the state. Langley Park, one of the communities that will be served by the incoming WMATA Purple Line, is a multicultural community composed of over 80% Latinos with household incomes that are 83% lower than the rest of Prince George's County.¹¹ Like Bladensburg, it is located within the Capital Beltway near a network of heavily trafficked roads with vehicles harmful air pollutants including particulate matter, NO_2 , black carbon, and volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Brandywine is a predominantly Black unincorporated community in Prince George's County, Maryland. Three large (250 megawatts) fossil fuel-fired power plants are located in or immediately outside of Brandywine, more than any other community in the state. Five large fossil fuel-fired power plants are located within thirteen miles of Brandywine, a concentration not repeated anywhere else in the state. Brandywine is home to 23% of large fossil fuel-fired power plants in the state, though it has only 0.17% of the land area of the state and 0.12% of the population of the State.¹² According to MD EJSCREEN, the overall score is 0.57 but its sensitive population score is 0.92. Curtis Bay, located in South Baltimore, has an overall EJ Score of 0.83; however, its environmental effect and sensitive populations scores are 0.99 and 0.96, respectively. Princess Anne, Maryland, located on the Eastern Shore, is home to an abundance of CAFOs. According to MD EJSCREEN, its sensitive population score is 0.95, placing its majority low-income residents at risk of exposure to contaminated groundwater and drinking water sources with nitrates, bacteria (*E. coli*), and pharmaceutical residues, increasing risks of cancer, birth defects, and gastrointestinal illnesses. MD EJSCREEN has also been used to determine the cutoff for community designation as an environmental benefit district (EBD).¹³ This designation was defined as an EJ Score at or above the 75th percentile with mean EJ scores 0.7 or higher, corresponding to an elevated level of environmental risk.¹⁴ Percentiles can be further stratified to identify “high needs” communities.

⁸ Kaiser, R., Romieu, I., Medina, S., Schwartz, J., Krzyzanowski, M., & Künzli, N. (2004). Air pollution attributable postneonatal infant mortality in US metropolitan areas: a risk assessment study. *Environmental Health*, 3, 1-6.

⁹ EPA. (2022). Biden-Harris Administration Announces Nearly \$500,000 for Community Air Pollution Monitoring Project in Maryland (Updated). <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/biden-harris-administration-announces-nearly-500000-community-air-pollution-monitoring>

¹⁰ Driver, A., Mehdizadeh, C., Bara-Garcia, S., Bodenreider, C., Lewis, J., & Wilson, S. (2019). Utilization of the Maryland environmental justice screening tool: A Bladensburg, Maryland case study. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 16(3), 348.

¹¹ CEEJH. (2021, May 10). Local traffic is choking Latinx neighborhoods in Langley Park, MD. Community Engagement, Environmental Justice & Health. <https://www.ceejh.center/air-quality-1/local-traffic-is-choking-latinx-neighborhoods-in-langley-park-md-yysen-6t4ge>

¹² CEEJH. (2019, February 3). Brandywine, MD as a “sacrifice zone” for the DMV. Community Engagement, Environmental Justice & Health. Retrieved April 21, 2022, from <https://www.ceejh.center/mid-atlantic/projects/2019/2/1/brandywine-md-as-a-sacrifice-zone-for-the-dmv-k9kls-zakag-jas3j>

¹³ Maryland Department of the Environment. (2003, November 6). *Press Release*. Maryland Department of the Environment. <https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/Pressroom/Pages/574.aspx>.

¹⁴ Ravichandran, V., Albert, R., & Wilson, S. M. (2021, August 2). *The Justice40 Initiative: Opportunities for Environmental Justice in the State of Maryland*. Community Engagement, Environmental Justice & Health. Retrieved February 16, 2022, from <https://www.ceejh.center/blog/the-justice40-initiative-opportunities-for-environmental-justice-in-the-state-of-maryland>

The CHERISH Act will:

- Ensure that community voices are prioritized in environmental decision-making and that residents have a say in land-use policies that impact their health and quality of life.
- Promote sustainable economic growth since a cleaner environment leads to stronger local economies by attracting businesses that align with clean energy, green infrastructure, and sustainable development.
- Ensuring environmental protections prevents businesses from externalizing pollution costs onto communities, creating a fairer and more just economic system.
- Promote workforce development programs in renewable energy, green infrastructure, and climate resilience, creating pathways to economic mobility.

Maryland has a responsibility to correct historic injustices and prevent future environmental harm. By passing the CHERISH Act, the state will demonstrate that it prioritizes:

- Public health over polluter profits
- Community voices through lengthy public comment periods
- A sustainable and just economy over short-term gains
- Workforce development programs for environmentally-burdened communities

We urge this committee to support and pass the CHERISH Act without delay. Thank you for your leadership and commitment to Environmental Justice and Public Health. We are happy to answer any questions or provide additional data in support of this critical legislation.

Sincerely,

Dr. Sacoby M. Wilson

Director, CEEJH INC