

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

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chair Korman and Members of the Committee,

As a resident of Morrell Park and a representative of Benjamin Franklin High School, I am writing to express my strong support of HB1484, the CHERISH Our Communities Act.

Over the summer, I was one of a few scholars participating in an environmental justice internship focused on addressing community issues—specifically the cumulative impacts of the 71+ polluting industries in Curtis Bay. The internship featured a plethora of research, planning, and rallying in protest of these facilities. One of the key factors in studying these facilities was their proximity to Benjamin Franklin High School in Curtis Bay, a school I attend. Within proximity are the CSX Coal Terminal, Petroleum Management Incorporation (PMI), ReConserve Animal Food Processing Facility, the Curtis Bay Medical Waste Incinerator, and the list goes on. These facilities constantly refute the claims that they pollute, but in fact, Curtis Bay is the most polluted community in the country. Many students live near these facilities, hence why students have a high asthma rate. The impact of these facilities is unprecedented, they constantly harm community health and plague our communities.

The CHERISH Act is a critical step toward protecting communities like mine from cumulative environmental harm. It will ensure that polluting facilities aren't easily able to continue going into already overburdened communities, by having an Environmental Impact Statement or an Existing Burden Report before permits are issued. For too long, communities in South Baltimore have suffered from the cumulative effects of pollution without a clear process to address these harms. The CHERISH Act will bring much-needed transparency by mandating public engagement and input from stakeholders, including the Maryland Department of Health and local officials. Additionally, the Act empowers the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) to deny new or expanded permits if they pose a risk to community health unless they serve an essential need that has no alternative. If facilities do receive renewed permits, they will be required to contribute to a Cumulative Impacts Mitigation Fund to help offset the damage they cause. This legislation will finally give overburdened communities the protection they need against environmental injustice and to prevent further harm to the residents of Maryland.

I strongly urge the committee to support HB1484 and help protect the health and well-being of Maryland's most vulnerable communities.

Sincerely,
Ryan Johnson
Benjamin Franklin High School Senior