

March 7, 2025

From: Nirupama Putcha, MD MHS

RE: CHERISH Our Communities Act

Dear Chair Korman and colleagues,

As a resident of Maryland and a pulmonary physician at Johns Hopkins providing care to residents of Baltimore city and surrounding communities, I am writing to express my strong support of HB1484, the CHERISH Our Communities Act.

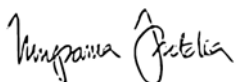
The health effects of air pollution are well studied. Particulate matter air pollution has been established as a cause of acute and chronic respiratory disease worldwide. In addition, studies have established that indoor air pollution, caused by multiple factors including the presence of outdoor air pollution, leads to respiratory morbidity in people of all ages, particularly among those with chronic disease. Patients with common chronic respiratory diseases such as asthma and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) are sensitive to the effects of air pollution- studies have shown that air pollution causes more symptoms and flare-ups that lead to emergency room and hospital visits. Accordingly, communities and individuals living near sources of pollutants, such as near major roadways and industrial sources of pollution, are disproportionately impacted.

These disproportionate impacts are evident to citizens of the community in Baltimore and are also evident to healthcare workers like me who treat people in the region with respiratory disease. The Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene has estimated that the prevalence of asthma in Baltimore city was 18.6% in 2009, higher than that estimated in the state of Maryland (13.9%) as well as the prevalence in the US. Additionally, it is clear the morbidity from respiratory disease is higher in Baltimore than in the state of Maryland and beyond. The estimated incidence of asthma emergency room visits in adults was nearly three times higher in Baltimore than in the state of Maryland (144.1 vs 50.3 per 10,000) and over two times higher in Baltimore children compared to the state of Maryland as a whole (360.2 vs 136.1 per 10,000; source: https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/mch/documents/asthma_control/Profile_BaltimoreCity.pdf). These may seem like surprising numbers, but those who work in hospitals are not surprised- we see this every day in the patients who present in extremis, struggling to breathe, to our hospitals in the region. And least surprised of all are the residents of Baltimore, who feel this every day, because of the air they breathe.

The CHERISH Our Communities Act is an important step towards addressing the disproportionate impacts of pollution from industrial sources on communities in Baltimore and in Maryland. This act will ensure appropriate assessment of environmental impact and will empower communities and citizens to ask important questions and engage in the process to make MDE's decision-making processes are transparent and inclusive.

We still have a lot of work ahead of us to improve respiratory health in Maryland and in the Baltimore communities. However, this legislation is one step in the right direction. As a pulmonary physician and researcher, I am strongly in support of the CHERISH Our Communities Act.

Sincerely,



Nirupama Putcha, MD MHS
Associate Professor of Medicine
Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine
Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine