

Testimony Supporting HB1484

CHERISH Our Communities Act: Cumulative Harms to Environmental Restoration for Improving our Shared Health

**House Environment & Transportation Committee
March 11, 2025**

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chair Korman and Members of the Committee,

The undersigned **41** community, climate, and environmental organizations and elected officials urge you to support **HB1484 (from Cumulative Harms to Environmental Restoration for Improving Shared Health - the CHERISH Our Communities Act)**. This important public health legislation will fill a critical gap in Maryland's ability to protect communities overburdened by pollution.

HB1484 will provide the Maryland Department of the Environment with critical tools to ensure that polluting facilities aren't increasingly concentrated in communities in Maryland already overburdened by pollution. HB1484 specifically covers communities in and immediately around census tracts with an environmental justice score of 75 or above, according to the Maryland Department of the Environment's EJ Screening Tool. Having this score means that a community is in the top 25% most polluted and most underserved census tracts in the state. Accordingly the state should design its permitting process to consider the existing pollution in communities with a high EJ score before siting another facility there that may add to and worsen the disproportionate burden of pollution on the community. This is similar to a preventive care visit at a doctor's office. We need to assess what's currently going on before recommending the next course of action.

For proposed projects within these specific geographic areas, HB1484 calls for extra information from the permit applicant in the form of an Environmental Impact Statement and Existing Burden Report, and calls the Maryland Department of the Environment to consider whether the project will increase the pollution burden on the surrounding community as part of their review process. If it will, HB1484 outlines steps for the MDE to take to protect the community and for continuing community benefits to address the harm of pollution.

HB1484, together with its companion bill HB1406 addressing polluting energy-generating facilities, represents the culmination of years of community-led coordination in assessing cumulative impacts of pollution. As states like New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, and Minnesota have passed legislation to address cumulative impacts in the past five years, Maryland cannot afford for its protections for overburdened communities to fall farther behind.

Please pass the CHERISH Our Communities Act to ensure that frontline communities in Maryland gain these critical protections in 2025.

Sincerely,

Mid-Atlantic Justice Coalition

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Nancy Assero, Chair: Peace and Justice
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**Beaverdam Creek Watershed Watch
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**Maryland Catholics for Our Common
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