



LEGISLATIVE BLACK CAUCUS OF MARYLAND, INC.

The Maryland House of Delegates, 6 Bladen Street, Room 300, Annapolis, Maryland 21401

410-841-3185 • 301-858-3185 • 800-492-7122 Ext. 3185 • Fax 410-841-3175 • 301-858-3175 • Black.Caucus@house.state.md.us

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Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

The Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland offers its strong and favorable support for House Bill 1484 (HB1484) / Senate Bill 978 (SB978) – The CHERISH Our Communities Act. This bill ensures that Maryland’s environmental permitting process takes environmental justice into account when reviewing new or renewing permits for polluting facilities in overly polluted areas across the state. It requires permitting agencies to assess the cumulative environmental and public health burdens on communities before approving projects, ensuring that Black Marylanders, who disproportionately reside in these impacted areas, are better protected from further environmental harm.

Black Marylanders have long been subjected to environmental injustices, with polluting industries disproportionately concentrated in historically Black neighborhoods. As a result, these communities face higher rates of asthma, cardiovascular disease, and other chronic health conditions due to prolonged exposure to toxic air, water, and land contamination. HB1484 / SB978 directly addresses this crisis by giving state agencies the authority to deny permits for projects that would worsen environmental burdens in these communities. Furthermore, the bill mandates that enforcement penalties against polluting facilities be reinvested into the communities most affected, providing critical funding for environmental health initiatives. This ensures that Black Marylanders receive both protection from future harm and resources to address the damage already inflicted by environmental neglect.

By prioritizing environmental justice in the permitting process, HB1484 / SB978 is a necessary step toward ensuring that Black Marylanders can live in healthier, safer environments. The bill amplifies community voices, increases transparency in environmental decision-making, and holds polluters accountable for the harm they cause. The Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland recognizes that environmental justice is racial justice, and for these reasons, we strongly support HB1484 / SB978.

Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland