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Testimony In Support of CHERISH Act PSC Bill (SB 780)

On behalf of our over 40,000 members in Maryland, Food & Water Watch urges Senators in this committee to submit a favorable report on the CHERISH Our Communities Act (SB780) which would require the Public Service Commission to conduct important environmental justice analyses before approving Certificates of Public Convenience and Necessity for polluting generation stations such as gas plants.

The CHERISH Act would fill an important gap in the PSC's permitting process, which doesn't currently consider how new polluters would further burden communities that already host gas plants, trash incinerators, and other polluters. The respiratory and cardiovascular effects of living near polluting generation stations are well known, and adding additional facilities to environmental justice communities would only exacerbate already poor health outcomes.

By analyzing the cumulative health and environmental impacts new polluters will cause, the PSC would be implementing norms and processes meant to safeguard against historical policies that have led to environmental racism and classism, and thus would take steps to reduce these harms.

The processes set by the CHERISH Act would only apply to communities that have been identified using environmental health indicators such as proximity to these emitting power plants, and/or communities who have negative health outcome rates higher than that of the rest of the state. This means the PSC would not be overwhelmed by a need to fulfill these requirements for every permit request that it receives.

It is also important to note that these new rules will only apply to polluting industries, not cleaner renewable energy industries, such as wind and solar power. This, then, would allow for these projects to secure their other required permits in a timely fashion ahead of the polluting ones.

We urge you to pass the CHERISH Act to defend overburdened communities and protect them from the harms of new, polluting power plants.