



**Testimony in Strong Support of SB0781 – The *CHERISH* Our Communities Act
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
March 3, 2026**

Position: STRONG SUPPORT

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee,

*On behalf of the **Community of Curtis Bay Association (CCBA)**, we write in the strongest possible support of SB0781, the *CHERISH* Our Communities Act.*

*Curtis Bay is an environmental justice community in South Baltimore that has lived for generations on the front lines of concentrated industrial pollution. Within and surrounding our neighborhood are coal export terminals, chemical storage, hazardous waste operations, landfills, and one of the nation's largest medical waste incinerators. Just a couple miles from homes and our local high school sits the **WIN Waste Innovations (formerly BRESCO)** incinerator, which burns approximately 2,250 tons of trash per day while transporting 130,000 tons of toxic ash residuals annually to the Quarantine Road Landfill in Curtis Bay.*

Our community understands cumulative impacts not as an academic theory, but as lived experience.

Our children have attended school under coal dust blowing from uncovered coal piles. Families live with chronic respiratory illness, asthma, and fear of the next explosion, leak, or smoke event. Residents have spent decades fighting permit after permit issued in isolation — each one evaluated as if it were the only source of pollution in our community.

That is the core injustice this bill corrects.

Why *CHERISH* Is Necessary

*Under Maryland's current permitting system, the Maryland Department of the Environment evaluates permits one at a time, without meaningfully accounting for the existing pollution burden already borne by surrounding residents. Even more troubling, nearby communities often have **no opportunity to comment on many types of air pollution permits**. This exclusion from decision-making has deepened mistrust and allowed pollution to accumulate in working-class communities like ours.*

*The *CHERISH* Act would:*

- *Incorporate cumulative impact analysis into MDE-issued permits.*
- *Apply only in communities that are already disproportionately burdened by pollution.*
- *Target a specific list of high-impact permits — primarily air pollution permits, certain water discharge permits, and waste permits.*
- *Ensure meaningful public participation in permitting decisions.*



- *Prevent new polluters from being sited in overburdened communities if they would worsen disproportionate health harms.*
- *Require pollution reductions from existing facilities at permit renewal if disproportionate impacts are found.*

This is not a blanket ban on development. It does not impact housing or ordinary small businesses. It is a narrowly tailored, evidence-based reform focused on preventing additional harm in the communities already carrying the heaviest load.

Other States Have Proven This Works

*Maryland is not alone. States including **New Jersey, New York, and Minnesota** have already enacted cumulative impacts laws. New Jersey's law is already being implemented and has successfully withstood legal challenge from industry opponents.*

Maryland now has the opportunity to join these states and become a national leader in environmental justice implementation.

Community-Led Reform

We are especially proud that the first draft of this legislation was written by South Baltimore residents, based on lived experience and informed by successful models across the country. Community members who have spent decades reviewing permits, attending hearings, documenting violations, and advocating for enforcement helped shape this bill from the ground up.

That is what democracy should look like.

For too long, frontline communities have been forced to fight permit by permit, stack by stack, facility by facility. CHERISH finally addresses the reality that pollution is cumulative — and so are its health consequences.

A Matter of Health and Equity

This legislation is fundamentally about protecting health.

It is about preventing another generation of children from growing up under the shadow of industrial stacks.

It is about correcting a system that has allowed disproportionate pollution to concentrate in low-income communities and communities of color.

It is about ensuring that the Maryland Department of the Environment has both the authority and the obligation to consider the full picture before allowing additional harm.

Curtis Bay residents are not asking for special treatment. We are asking for fair treatment.



We respectfully urge the Committee to give SB0781 a favorable report and move Maryland toward a more just, transparent, and health-protective permitting system.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Community of Curtis Bay Association (CCBA)

www.ilovecurtisbay.com