



CHILDREN'S ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH & PROTECTION ADVISORY COUNCIL

February 26, 2026

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment
Committee
2 West, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Marc Korman
Chair, Environment and Transportation Committee
Taylor House Office Building, Room 251
Annapolis, MD 21401-1912

RE: **SUPPORT Senate Bill 781/ House Bill 1268** Environmental Permits – Requirements for Burden Analysis, Issuance and Renewal, and Public Participation (Cumulative Harms for Environmental Restoration for Improving Shared Health – CHERISH Our Communities Act)

Dear Chair Feldman and Chair Korman:

The Maryland Children's Environmental Health and Protection Advisory Council (CEHPAC) respectfully submits this letter of **SUPPORT for Senate Bill 781 and House Bill 1268 - Environmental Permits – Requirements for Burden Analysis, Issuance and Renewal, and Public Participation (Cumulative Harms for Environmental Restoration for Improving Shared Health – CHERISH Our Communities Act)**. This bill requires an application for the issuance or renewal of a covered individual environmental permit for a site or facility located within an at-risk census tract to include a report describing the environmental and public health burdens. This report must describe the existing environmental and public health issues in the area and how the facility contributes to the burden including specific data on pollution, traffic, and potential exposures to pollution and contaminants.

The Maryland Department of the Environment is required to issue a determination as to whether approving a covered individual environmental permit will cause or contribute to adverse environmental or public health stressors. Permits which would cause or contribute to stressors may be denied if the applicant cannot provide a compelling public interest or if reasonable alternatives exist. The bill also enhances public participation in the permitting process, increasing penalties for violations in at-risk areas, and mandates that a portion of settlement funds from enforced actions be used for community benefit.

Established by the General Assembly, the purpose of CEHPAC is to identify environmental hazards that may affect children's health and recommend solutions to those hazards. CEHPAC supports the proposed legislation to the extent that it promotes positive health and environmental outcomes that in turn will include children. Children experience a disproportionate risk and greater risk than adults for exposure to and possible illness from environmental hazards. CEHPAC supports decreasing cumulative harms that impact the health of children in overburdened and underserved communities, moving towards:

- The lowest possible toxicity or hazard profile.
- The most favorable environmental profile (least possible persistence and/or environmental impact).
- The least total effect of multiple adverse experiences in their lives.

The CHERISH Act will also address the disproportionate environmental and public health harms that environmental justice communities in Maryland face from pollution generating facilities. For centuries, these facilities have been disproportionately and deliberately sited in marginalized and economically distressed communities in Maryland. Low-wealth, Black, and other communities of color in Maryland face greater cancer risks and exposure to air toxics due to higher pollution burden. Currently, many environmental permit applications do not include a public engagement process or take into consideration the cumulative impacts posed by multiple and historic sources of pollution. The CHERISH Act prioritizes Maryland residents' well-being, especially of our most vulnerable, and ensures that decision-making processes are transparent and inclusive.

CEHPAC seeks to ensure that the rules, regulations, and standards of the State protect children from environmental hazards and enable children in Maryland to grow up in a safe and healthy environment. CEHPAC urges the Committee to issue a favorable report on this bill. CEHPAC looks forward to working with the General Assembly on this, and thanks you for your leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Megan Weil Latshaw". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Megan Weil Latshaw, PhD MHS
Commission Member
Children's Environmental Health and Protection Advisory Council

Cc: CEHPAC Members