

Testimony on: SB0781– 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)

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment

Submitting: Rhonda Kranz

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: March 3, 2026

Dear Chair Feldman and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing my written testimony in support of SB0781, the CHERISH our Communities Act - Environmental Permits. This is an issue of great importance to me. As a Marylander and concerned citizen, I am troubled by the lack of protections against the continued siting of polluting facilities near our already overburdened and underserved communities. The current permitting processes does not provide protection for local residents who are forced to endure this discriminatory practice.

SB0781 takes an important step in addressing this problem by adding requirements in the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) permitting system to better protect communities that already face heavy pollution burdens. It will provide an opportunity for nearby communities to express their concerns about planned or renewal of facilities in their communities in a public process to be consider in decisions on permits to pollute.

SB0781 would: apply only to parts of the state that are burdened by disproportionate pollution; incorporate consideration of cumulative impacts into Maryland's process of issuing permits to pollute, based on laws already passed in New Jersey, Minnesota, and New York; apply to a specific list of types of permits, mostly air pollution permits, water pollution permits for a narrow list of types of industries, and waste disposal permits; will not impact most businesses, and will not impact housing or other construction (unless it is the construction of a facility that would pollute), and ensure public participation in the process and fix this longstanding environmental injustice.

It is important that this bill addresses environmental justice and health issues. Over the last sixty years a disproportionate number of Maryland's power plants have been cited in communities of color. Pollutants from these plants include mercury and neurotoxins and are especially harmful to children. The communities also suffer from the noise, traffic, and water contamination, and social upheaval that accompany these facilities. SB0781 would prevent new polluters from being built in environmental justice communities if the MDE determines, through a public process and public input, that allowing it to be built would contribute to a disproportionate pollution and health burden on the nearby community.

We have seen the impacts of disproportionate pollution in Curtis Bay, South Baltimore, and Brandywine and dozens of other communities in Maryland. Environmental justice must be front and center as Maryland continues to develop. SB0781 will be required MDE to take environmental justice scores and cumulative pollution burdens into account when making

permitting decisions. For these reasons, I urge the committee to issue a FAVORABLE report for SB0781.