



SB 0781

Hearing before the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

March 3, 2026

POSITION: Favorable

Community Law Center (CLC), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, is a legal partner to Maryland neighborhoods and nonprofits in pursuit of more just and vibrant communities. CLC was founded in 1983 by a group of lawyers and community organizers who identified the need for residents of under-resourced communities to have the tools to effectively advocate for themselves. CLC provides direct legal representation to communities and nonprofits on issues of equitable development, environmental justice, organizational governance, real estate, contracts, and more. We advocate for the self-determination and flourishing of Maryland neighborhoods and nonprofit organizations.

CLC supports SB 0781 because it will help to ensure that additional environmental harm is not situated in Maryland's most environmentally burdened communities.

Unfortunately, many of the communities in Maryland with the fewest resources available to respond to pollution and other environmental harms are the exact communities where most of the environmental burdens of our society have been placed. This placement is not accidental; municipalities have historically zoned land in low-market value areas "Industrial." It follows that residential land around industrial zones loses additional market value once industry is situated near it. This means that Maryland's poorest residents can sometimes only afford to live in areas near industry, where pollution burden is high.

Currently, the MDE assesses permits on a case-by-case basis, meaning that if individual projects meet a certain pollution threshold, they can be approved. The MDE is not required to assess existing pollution in a project area before it approves a permit. This means that the amount of pollution a community already experiences is not taken into consideration before more pollution is permitted. This may make sense for industry, but it does not make sense for residents of Maryland. If there are ten pollution sources in one community, the cumulative impact of those ten sources for residents *must be considered* before an eleventh polluting source is permitted to locate in that community. SB 0781 ensures that the MDE consider existing burden before approving additional burden in any location. It just makes sense.

As an organization that advocates for the interests of communities who have long borne the brunt of societal injustice, we are thrilled that the State of Maryland is poised to take a crucial step to address some of the harm that continues to be placed in our poorest communities.

CLC strongly supports SB 0781. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

For the above reasons,
CLC urges a FAVORABLE VOTE ON SB 0781.

Please contact Christina Schoppert Devereux, Staff Attorney at Community Law Center, with any questions.
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