



**Testimony on SB 781**

**Cumulative Harms for Environmental Restoration for Improving Shared Health -**

**CHERISH Our Communities Act**

**Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee**

**Date: March 3, 2026**

**Position: SUPPORT**

[Maryland Climate Partners](#) strongly supports **SB 781**, which would clarify the authority of the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) to consider cumulative environmental and public health impacts when making permitting decisions. This bill represents a necessary and practical step to ensure Maryland's environmental permitting laws are implemented in a manner consistent with the Climate Solutions Now Act (CSNA) and the state's broader climate and environmental justice commitments.

Maryland Climate Partners is a coalition of environmental, faith, consumer advocacy, and social justice organizations focused on the full and equitable implementation of the CSNA. The coalition formed in 2021 to support the passage of bold climate legislation, and we continue to advocate for policies that ensure Maryland has the tools and resources necessary to meet its climate commitments while protecting affordability and advancing equity.

One of the coalition's 2026 policy priorities is ensuring that state climate policies meaningfully protect **overburdened and underserved communities**, which have historically experienced disproportionate exposure to pollution and environmental hazards. **SB 781** directly advances this priority by strengthening how existing environmental review processes account for real-world conditions on the ground.

Current permitting frameworks often evaluate emissions or impacts in isolation, even in areas where communities already face multiple, overlapping sources of pollution. **SB 781** addresses this gap by explicitly authorizing MDE to consider cumulative impacts when reviewing permits. This statutory clarity will help ensure permitting decisions reflect the combined environmental and public health burdens experienced by communities, rather than treating each source as if it exists alone.

Importantly, **SB 781** does not create new environmental standards or prohibit new development. Instead, it provides MDE with clearer guidance on how to apply its existing

authority in a way that is consistent, transparent, and aligned with Maryland law. By grounding cumulative impacts consideration in statute, the bill helps reduce uncertainty for regulators, applicants, and communities alike, while supporting more informed and defensible decision-making.

Cumulative impacts analysis aligns with the CSNA's directive that state agencies consider the long-term climate and equity implications of their actions. CSNA establishes clear emissions reduction targets while also defining "overburdened" and "underserved" communities that warrant targeted consideration in climate-related decision-making. By requiring permitting decisions to account for existing environmental and public health burdens, **SB 781** helps ensure that agency processes are consistent with those statutory equity provisions and do not perpetuate the continued concentration of harm in the same communities.

**SB 781** reflects a measured, legally sound approach to environmental review—one that improves implementation without disrupting existing regulatory structures. It equips MDE to carry out its responsibilities in a way that better reflects Maryland's statutory commitments to public health, equity, and climate action.

We strongly urge a favorable report on **SB 781**.