

Bill: SB780: Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity - Burden Analysis (CHERISH Our Communities Act)

Hearing Date: March 3, 2026

Bill Sponsor: Sen Brooks

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Committee Members: Senators Feldman, Kagan, Attar, Brooks, Carozza, Gallion, Harris, Hester, Simonaire, Washington, Watson

Submitting Organization: The Green Team of St John The Evangelist Roman Catholic Church

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing our testimony today in support of SB780: Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity - Burden Analysis (CHERISH Our Communities Act). The Green Team at St. John the Evangelist Roman Catholic (SJERC) Church in Columbia, Maryland, urges this committee to vote favorably on the CHERISH Act. Our group's mission is to care for all of God's creation, both the human and natural world, as instructed by Catholic social teaching. To that end, our activities include planting trees and gardens, educating ourselves and our communities about environmental issues, and engaging in advocacy. We are providing written testimony in strong support of SB780, which would address the disproportionate environmental and public health harms that environmental justice communities in Maryland historically have and currently are facing.

For centuries, polluting facilities have been disproportionately and deliberately sited in minority and economically distressed communities in Maryland. The Public Service Commission (PSC) is responsible for issuing Certificates of Public Convenience and Necessity (CPCN) for generating stations but often the PSC only considers CPCNs for each facility and its emissions in a vacuum - not considering the total impact from the concentration of polluters in the surrounding community.

The CHERISH Our Communities Act will change this unjust system. The Act will require environmental justice review and community input for specific CPCNs under consideration. These would include certificates for specific types of generating stations located within a certain at-risk census tract (communities in and immediately around census tracts with an environmental justice score of 75 or above, according to Maryland's EJ Screening Tool). And if the PSC concludes that issuing the certificate would harm nearby communities, the CHERISH Our Communities Act will protect the community either by ensuring the certificate is denied, or by requiring additional controls for the generating station and benefits for the community.

Maryland communities that have suffered from an undue and disproportionate burden of pollution should not have to endure further injury from new, expanded, or renewed permitted projects. SB780

provides a thoughtful process to avoid future harm. The Green Team of SJERC Church strongly supports HB1287 and urges a FAVORABLE report in Committee.