



**CLIMATE COALITION**  
**Montgomery County, MD**

**Testimony on:** SB0780– Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity - BURDEN Analysis (CHERISH Our Communities Act)  
**Committee:** Education, Energy, and the Environment  
**Organization:** Climate CoalitionMontgomery County  
**Submitting:** Karl Held  
**Position:** Favorable  
**Hearing Date:** March 3, 2026

Dear Chair Feldman and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing our testimony today in support of SB0780. The Climate Coalition Montgomery County, a group of 20 local organizations whose mission is to lead action on climate change, advance a sustainable and just economy, and build resilience. urges you to vote favorably on SB0780.

SB0780 would require an application for a certificate of public convenience and necessity (CPCN) for certain generating stations located within a certain at-risk area to include with the application a baseline understanding of risk, disparities, and environmental needs (BURDEN) report describing and including information on environmental and public health burdens. The bill would address the need for the PSC to consider cumulative exposures for neighborhoods already overburdened from pollution when issuing a CPCN.

This bill addresses both environmental justice and health issues. First, the legacy of racism underlies the location of power plants, and this in turn, has led to the disproportionate exposure to harmful pollution in the surrounding communities. As early as 1940, and as late as 2019, evidence links historic red-lining to power plant siting, which in turn leads to a disproportionate burden on [communities of color](#) from the pollutants emitted by these power plants. In addition to power plants themselves, related activities [expose communities](#) to pollution from truck traffic, noise, water contamination and social disruption. Residents of Prince George’s County are fighting for their right to breathe clean air. Brandywine in particular, is exposed to inexcusable examples of [environmental and racial injustice](#). The community is 67% black and has 4 power plants. [They have had to fight against](#) another (gas fired) power plant coming to their area. In addition, diesel trucks, groundwater pollution from a military toxic waste dump, and PM2.5 from

coal ash recently rated the [7<sup>th</sup> worst](#) such site in the nation. SB0780 requires the PSC to consider cumulative effects.

Second, health harms from mercury and other neurotoxins affect children who live near power plants. [Evidence](#) links neurobehavioral health problems to proximity to coal fired power plants and coal ash. Mercury and other neurotoxic pollutants are emitted from coal and oil fired power plants and are toxic to the [developing brain](#) especially in utero but also to infants and young children. Exposure to mercury from fish is [higher](#) in proximity to power plants, which would affect low income families eating a subsistence diet dependent on fishing. SB0780 requires the PSC to consider health risks.

Third, repeal of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Mercury and Air Toxic (MAT) standards for power plants increases the need for a bill like CHERISH to protect the health of Marylanders. MAT standards saved 33 million dollars in [health costs](#) according to the EPA, and now those safeguards will be gone. The mercury standards repeal will worsen the disproportionate health effects on communities in proximity to power plants. According to the American Lung Association, it will “expose people to toxic pollution proven to harm brain development, trigger asthma attacks and cause cancer and premature death. In addition, weakening these protections will also place an [unfair burden](#) on the communities located nearest these polluting facilities, who already breathe too much unhealthy air.”

SB780 will require the PSC to factor in health and environmental harms when issuing a CPCN in already overburdened communities. The weakening of EPA protections under the current administration increases the need for CHERISH to protect these very communities and especially the young children who grow up near power plants.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable vote in committee on SB780.