



## **SB0781**

### **Environmental Permits - Requirements for Burden Analysis, Issuance and Renewal, and Public Participation (CHERISH Our Communities Act)**

**Testimony before Senate Education, Energy, and Environment**

**Hearing March 3, 2026**

**Position: Favorable**

Dear Chair Feldman and Co-Chair Kagan, and members of the committee, my name is Virginia Smith, and I represent the 1700+ members of Indivisible Howard County. Indivisible Howard County is an active member of the Maryland Legislative Coalition (with 30,000+ members). We are providing written testimony today **in support of SB0781**, which would require a report on the environmental and public health burdens in an at-risk census tract for any new environmental permit or renewal. It also requires the Department of the Environment (DOE) to consider these reports before approving the permit. We thank Senator Brooks for introducing this bill.

As a young child, I had many asthma attacks that sent me to the hospital, so I know how terrifying it can feel to think you may pass out because you cannot take one more breath. While my asthma was hereditary, it breaks my heart to know that there are children and adults in communities throughout Maryland who have an increased risk of many diseases, like asthma and cancer, simply because they live in an area where facilities are continually opened and adding to pollution production because the State does not currently assess the overall amount of pollution that a community will have when reviewing permits. In fact, in South Baltimore alone, four pollutants from two waste incinerators cause \$97 million worth of health damages every year.

SB0781, in conjunction with SB0780, will begin to address this problem, by requiring any applicant for a new or renewed environmental permit in at risk areas to submit a report describing the public health and environmental burdens for that area, including any new or increased pollutants that will be added to the environment from the current applicant. It also defines when the DOE will need to deny these permits if it will contribute or cause adverse stressors or indicators in the at-risk area.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

**We respectfully urge a favorable report.**

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