



NATIONAL AQUARIUM®

Date: March 3, 2026

Bill: SB 781 -

Environmental Permits - Requirements for Burden Analysis, Issuance and Renewal, and Public Participation (Cumulative Harms for Environmental Restoration for Improving Shared Health - CHERISH Our Communities Act)

Position: Support

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee:

The National Aquarium respectfully requests a favorable report for SB 781, which updates Maryland Department of Environment's permitting processes for specific air and water pollution and waste disposal permits. This legislation is part of the CHERISH Our Communities Act package that is crucially necessary to protect vulnerable communities and live up to Maryland's environmental justice commitments.

The National Aquarium connects people with nature to inspire compassion and care for our ocean planet. Our three overarching strategic goals to combat climate change, stop plastic pollution, and save wildlife and habitats are guided by principles of equity and environmental justice. For more than a decade, the National Aquarium has collaborated with neighbors from Baltimore's Brooklyn and Curtis Bay communities and other partners through the Masonville Cove Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership, restoring access to and offering year-round educational programming on over 100 acres of remediated land and water. Masonville Cove is adjacent to several communities of Baltimore residents who historically and presently bear a disproportionate share of the impacts of industrial pollution. In Baltimore and beyond, industrial facilities are often concentrated in or near communities of color and economically distressed areas, and people living there inequitably and unjustly experience cumulative impacts of pollution from those facilities.

Together with SB780, this bill address gaps in the state's current process which lacks full consideration of cumulative impacts of pollution as well as appropriate public process participation opportunities for nearby communities. Accounting for cumulative impacts in permitting decisions and setting strict guidelines for community engagement is overdue and necessary to fulfill the state's commitment to environmental justice, public health, and the well-being of all Marylanders.

We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on SB 781.

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