



SB0781 - SUPPORT  
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SB0781 – Environmental Permits – Requirements for Burden Analysis and Renewal, and Public Participation (Cumulative Harms for Environmental Restoration for Improving Shared Health – CHERISH Our Communities Act)

Meeting of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

March 3, 2026

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee, on behalf of Elders Climate Action Maryland, I urge a favorable report on SB0781, the CHERISH Our Communities Act.

Elders Climate Action is a nationwide organization devoted to ensuring that our children, grandchildren, and future generations have a world in which they can thrive. The Maryland Chapter has members across the state.

Climate change is the main focus of our work, but we recognize air pollution as one of the greatest threats to our health. Also, climate change and air pollution share root causes.

Air pollution and its deadly effects are not evenly distributed. Many communities face much higher burdens and significantly worse health outcomes. Those communities are disproportionately underserved and have more vulnerable populations.

We see that clearly in Maryland communities like the Curtis Bay neighborhood in Baltimore. That community suffers from 70 sources of industrial air pollution, including the largest medical waste incinerator in the United States. In 2017, the Baltimore City Health Department reported that the life expectancy at birth for

Curtis Bay residents was among the lowest in Baltimore, and they had higher rates of respiratory illness, heart disease, and cancer than the city as a whole.<sup>1</sup>

Currently, the Maryland Department of the Environment lacks the legal authority to make permitting decisions based on environmental justice data and cumulative impacts.

The CHERISH Our Communities Act (Cumulative Harms to Environmental Restoration for Improving Our Shared Health) is well named. It will address a critical gap in Maryland's environmental protection system by requiring MDE to consider cumulative impacts on communities when they make decisions on new permits.

The CHERISH Act also requires meaningful community engagement for all major pollution permits. MDE may reject a permit because of the impacts, or it may require strong conditions to reduce pollution and create community benefits agreements.

New Jersey, New York, and Minnesota have already made similar changes in their permitting system. Maryland should join these states as a leader for environmental justice and protect our vulnerable communities from further harm.

For all of these reasons, we strongly urge a favorable report on SB0781, the CHERISH Our Communities Act. Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> Baltimore City 2017 Neighborhood Health Profile - Brooklyn/Curtis Bay/Hawkins Point (Baltimore City Health Department, 2017).