



**Testimony Supporting SB0781
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
March 3, 2026**

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee,

Clean Water Action urges you to issue a favorable report on SB0781, the CHERISH Our Communities Act applying to MDE-issued permits. This important legislation will provide important, targeted environmental health protections for the communities in Maryland most overburdened by pollution.

SB0781 is environmental justice legislation developed and driven by frontline communities in Maryland. This bill identifies polluting facilities of greatest concern to frontline communities in Maryland, and the permits relevant to their pollution. The bill applies specifically to covered permits proposed to be sited in or near communities in Maryland already at risk from pollution according to data in the Maryland Department of the Environment's EnviroScreen tool. The bill will fill critical gaps in Maryland's current system of issuing permits to pollute, ensuring that communities have the opportunity to participate in the permitting process and that community health is put first in communities in Maryland currently experiencing environmental injustice.

This bill is both the result of years and decades of organizing and advocacy among communities in Maryland overburdened by pollution, and reflective of lessons learned from successful bills passed in states like New Jersey, Minnesota, Connecticut, and New York. Please issue a favorable report on SB0781 incorporating the amendments reflecting updated consensus so that communities on the front lines of pollution in Maryland can gain these critical protections.

Thank you,

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