

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee,

As a resident of South Baltimore and a Sustainable and Urban Environmental Engineering student at Morgan State University, I am writing to express my strong support of SB0781, the CHERISH Our Communities Act applying to MDE-issued permits. The community I live in, Lakeland, is located just a mile away from heavily polluting industrial sites. As a result, my family, neighbors, and I are placed at constant risk of exposure to hazardous air pollutants, including particulate matter, volatile organic compounds, and other toxic emissions. These pollutants are well-documented contributors to respiratory disease, cardiovascular conditions, and long-term health complications. When MDE issues or renews permits for facilities in already overburdened communities like mine without fully accounting for cumulative impacts, it perpetuates environmental inequities that have existed for decades.

The impacts of this pollution extend far beyond statistics, they shape our daily lives. Many of my peers struggle with asthma and other respiratory illnesses that are worsened by the industrial activity surrounding our neighborhoods and schools. Instead of enjoying clean air and a safe environment, we are forced to live with preventable health risks.

Applying the CHERISH Our Communities Act to MDE-issued permits is essential. It would ensure that cumulative environmental and public health impacts are meaningfully considered before new or renewed permits are granted. It would also create a stronger framework for community input, so residents most affected by pollution are not excluded from decisions that directly impact their health and futures.

Sincerely,

Jose Alvarenga