

Dear Honorable Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan and Members of the Committee,

My name is Linda Girdner and I live in Gambrills, MD. I am writing to urge you to **support SB0781 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)**.

Pollution generating facilities have been disproportionately and deliberately sited in minority and economically distressed communities in Maryland for at least 200 years. Dr. Robert Bullard coined the term “human sacrifice zone” to describe communities inundated by environmental justice (EJ) issues and polluting industries. Environmental justice is the indelible right to equitable environmental protection under the law; the ability to live safe, healthy, and productive lives; and possessing the decision-making power to effect positive environmental change. EJ, fenceline and frontline communities are homes, community centers, schools, and playgrounds that, similar to battlefields, have very real casualties and impacts upon quality of life.

Low-wealth, Black, and other communities of color in Maryland face greater cancer risks and exposure to air toxics due to higher pollution burden. For example, Johns Hopkins Department of Environmental Health and Engineering at the Bloomberg School of Public Health found that the coal terminal at Curtis Bay is a significant driver of air pollution burdens, providing data from their [study](#) that supports what Curtis Bay residents have reported for many years.

The CHERISH Act amends Maryland's environmental law to provide adequate environmental impact assessment and opportunities for public participation for new, renewed, and expanded environmental permits that are issued by the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE). Currently, many environmental permit applications do not even include a public engagement process, and do not take into consideration the cumulative harms posed by multiple and historic sources of pollution. The CHERISH Act prioritizes Maryland residents’ well-being and ensures that MDE’s decision-making processes are transparent and inclusive.

The CHERISH Act builds on the robust conversations from the 2024 Legislative Session on HB 24/SB96, which passed ENT, ECM, and the House as whole but did not move in the Senate. Now it is your opportunity to weigh in on legislation that is in direct alignment with environmental justice goals set forth in Maryland’s Climate Pollution Reduction plan and in MDE’s recent Climate Implementation Plan.

Let us not continue “human sacrifice zones” in Maryland. Please vote favorable on SB0781 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) in committee and on the floor.

Thank you for your consideration.

Linda Girdner

Member, Showing Up for Racial Justice, Annapolis and Anne Arundel County