

February 27, 2026

Testimony on: SB781 – CHERISH Our Communities Act

Submitting: Veronica Gasca

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: March 3, 2026

Dear Chair and Committee Members,

My name is Veronica Gasca, and I have been a proud resident of Baltimore City's District 6 for the past nine years. I am a mother of two children, and while I am grateful that my children do not currently suffer from asthma or respiratory illness, this issue is deeply personal to me.

My nephew suffers from asthma, and I have witnessed firsthand the fear, stress, and pain that asthma attacks cause—not only for him, but for my sister as a mother. Watching a child struggle to breathe is something no family should have to experience. Unfortunately, in many Baltimore neighborhoods, especially communities like ours, asthma and other respiratory illnesses are far too common due to long-standing exposure to poor air quality and pollution.

For too long, our communities have carried the burden of cumulative environmental impacts. We live near busy highways, industrial sites, and other sources of pollution that affect the air we breathe every day. Families in our neighborhoods should not have to choose between staying in their homes and protecting their health. Clean air is not a luxury—it is a basic right.

This issue is even more urgent for me because my sister is currently pregnant. As we prepare to welcome a new baby into our family, I worry about the health risks that pollution poses to pregnant women and newborns. Every child deserves to be born into a healthy environment, free from preventable respiratory illnesses and long-term health problems.

The CHERISH Our Communities Act will help address the cumulative impacts that have harmed neighborhoods like mine for decades. It will ensure that the state takes into account the total environmental and health burdens communities face before allowing new pollution sources. This is a common-sense, preventative approach that prioritizes health, equity, and fairness.

I respectfully urge you to give SB781 a favorable report. Our families deserve clean air, healthy pregnancies, and a future where our children can grow up without fear of preventable illness.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Veronica Gasca