Testimony Supporting SB 780
Education, Energy, & the Environment Committee
February 27th, 2026
Position: FAVORABLE

DC.MD.NoVA INTERFAITH Power & Light
Our religious response to climate change.

Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Interfaith Power & Light (DC.MD.NoVa), working with a thousand congregations in Maryland, we respectfully urge a favorable report on SB 780, the CHERISH Our Communities Act.

Across Maryland, we see a painful and persistent reality: some communities – often low-income communities and communities of color – live with a disproportionate share of pollution. Families worship, learn, work, and raise children in the shadow of highways, industrial facilities, and incinerators.

Our faith traditions teach us that every person is created with inherent dignity and that we are called to protect the health of our neighbors and our common home. When additional pollution is proposed for communities already overburdened, justice requires accountability.

The CHERISH Our Communities Act brings core moral values into our energy siting process. This legislation requires that applications for a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (CPCN) for certain generating stations located in at-risk census tracts include a Baseline Understanding of Risk, Disparities, and Environmental Needs (BURDEN) report. By using Maryland's Environmental Justice (EJ) tool and clearly identifying cumulative environmental and public health stressors, the bill ensures that decision–makers and the public have a complete picture of existing burdens before new ones are added.

For too long, permitting decisions have evaluated projects in isolation, without fully accounting for the cumulative impacts communities already experience. The result has been a pattern in which the same neighborhoods repeatedly absorb new sources of pollution. This bill changes that by requiring the Public Service Commission to determine whether a proposed generating station would cause or contribute to adverse environmental or public health stressors that exceed those borne elsewhere in the State. If it would, the Commission must deny the application, unless the applicant can clearly demonstrate a genuine public interest for the affected community.

Importantly, the bill does not apply to wind, solar, or geothermal generating stations. In doing so, it aligns Maryland's energy future with cleaner technologies while protecting communities from further harm caused by more polluting facilities.

The CHERISH Act also strengthens transparency and public participation. By requiring clear notice, posting of BURDEN reports, and public hearings that address both the application and the associated environmental impacts, the bill affirms the right of communities to be informed and heard.

This bill recognizes that "public convenience and necessity" cannot be separated from public health, environmental integrity, and justice.

We urge you to stand with Maryland's impacted communities to advance equity in our energy system and to give SB 780 a favorable report.