

Testimony Supporting 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)

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

March 3, 2026

Position: FAVORABLE

Chair Korman, Vice-Chair Guyton, and members of the Committee,

My name is Evelyn Hoon. I am a lifelong Marylander, a resident of District 46, and a Doctoral Researcher in Social Anthropology enrolled at the University of Cambridge (UK), where I study environmental health in Baltimore City and North Anne Arundel County. My opinions herein are my own, and do not reflect the position of the University of Cambridge. Today, I am writing to urge the committee to issue a favorable report on SB0780 and SB0781, the CHERISH Our Communities Act.

As a social scientist, my research has investigated the healthcare experiences of older adults experiencing pollution-related chronic illnesses in Baltimore. As you may know, **older adults are highly vulnerable to impacts from air pollution**, which can aggravate heart disease and stroke, lung diseases, and diabetes. Exposure to small particulate matter (PM2.5) increases older adults' risk of hospitalization for cardiovascular and respiratory emergencies, as well as contributing to dementia risk. PM2.5, along with dozens of other priority pollutants, is emitted by stationary pollution sources governed by MDE permits (relevant proposed legislation: SB0781).

Currently, many communities in Maryland are surrounded by dozens of stationary pollution sources, and thus experience air pollution burdens many times higher than considered safe by EPA or WHO standards. This has real impacts for older adults in Maryland. The CHERISH Our Communities Act (SB0780 and SB0781) will take reasonable action to protect the health of our most vulnerable populations. It will apply **only specific overburdened and underserved geographic regions**. SB0781 will only apply to a specific subset of MDE permits – primarily air pollution permits, with a narrow list of water and waste disposal permits also included. Resultantly, **SB0781 will not impact most businesses, and will not impact housing or other construction**. SB0781's reasonable and low demand upon MDE will result in major benefits to the health of Marylanders.

The CHERISH Act is personal to me. Through my research, I have developed close relationships with many individuals impacted by air pollution. **Several months ago, a dear friend and central informant for my Masters thesis passed away.** I will never forget all the afternoons spent sitting with him in the local diner, snacking on old bay potato chips and iced tea, watching college football, and discussing his life and medical history. He lived for many years with Asthma-COPD overlap syndrome (ACOS),

and was diagnosed with lung cancer in his mid-60s. He was not a smoker or an industrial worker, but he lived his whole life next door to dozens of industrial sites, in a heavily polluted and underserved community – Fairfield, and later Brooklyn, in District 46. He was kind, thoughtful, and endlessly witty. He loved fishing and Christmas movies. He is survived by his five children and three grandchildren. His death was avoidable.

Today, you have the power to pass legislation to protect Marylanders from pollution-related illness; to re-write this too-familiar story of struggle; to turn over a bright new page for our state, and make Maryland a leader in the nation for environmental protections.

SB0780 and SB0781 will empower the PSC and MDE to take reasonable action to protect the health and environment of our state's most overburdened and underserved communities. This bill package, which should be **considered and passed together**, reasonably reforms permitting processes for the Public Service Commission (SB0780), and the Maryland Department of the Environment (SB0781), as the sponsor panel will detail.

All of us testifying favorable today sincerely hope to celebrate the passing of this exciting piece of common-sense, community-led legislation this session. As a proud Marylander, researcher, and friend and collaborator of those impacted by cumulative pollution, **I strongly urge a favorable report on SB0780 and SB0781.**

Sincerely,

Evelyn Hoon

Private citizen – Resident, District 46

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Reference material for further review:

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Simoni et al. 2015. *Adverse effects of outdoor pollution in the elderly*. Journal of Thoracic Disease, <http://doi.org.10.3978/j.issn.2072-1439.2014.12.10>

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