



SB0780 - SUPPORT  
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SB0780 – Environmental Permits – Certificate of Public Convenience and  
Necessity – CHERISH Our Communities Act)

Meeting of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

March 3, 2026

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee, on behalf of Elders Climate Action Maryland, I urge a favorable report on SB0780, the CHERISH Our Communities Act.

Elders Climate Action is a nationwide organization devoted to ensuring that our children, grandchildren, and future generations have a world in which they can thrive. The Maryland Chapter has members across the state.

Climate change is the main focus of our work, but we recognize air pollution as one of the greatest threats to our health. Also, climate change and air pollution share root causes.

Air pollution and its deadly effects are not evenly distributed. Many communities face much higher burdens and significantly worse health outcomes. Those communities are disproportionately underserved and have more vulnerable populations.

Fossil fuel burning power plants bring with them a host of environmental problems, including emissions of PM<sub>2.5</sub> and NO<sub>x</sub>, which have multiple negative impacts on our health. Coal-fired plants are also major emitters of mercury, which is particularly dangerous to children. The Environmental Protection Agency

recently repealed the Mercury and Air Toxics Standard for power plants, which increases the hazard.

Power plants are not evenly distributed throughout the state. They are often built near other polluting facilities, even other power plants. The effects of redlining are still apparent in Maryland today and often lead to disproportionate pollution burdens in communities of color.

For example, the residents of Brandywine in Prince George's County are 67% black. Their community is 67% black. In 2016, they had four power plants in their area and had to fight the addition of a fifth<sup>1</sup>.

The CHERISH Our Communities Act (Cumulative Harms to Environmental Restoration for Improving Our Shared Health) is well named. It will address a critical gap in Maryland's environmental protection system. SB780 will require the Public Service Commission to factor in health and environmental harms when considering a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity in already overburdened communities. It is a logical and needed complement to SB0781, which requires the Maryland Department of the Environment to consider cumulative impact when issuing permits.

For all of these reasons, we strongly urge a favorable report on SB0780, the CHERISH Our Communities Act. Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Deaton, "In Maryland, One Community Is Taking a Stand against Environmental Racism," *Grist*, July 27, 2016, <https://grist.org/justice/in-maryland-one-community-is-taking-a-stand-against-environmental-racism/>.