



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

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FAVORABLE

TO: Senator Brian Feldman, Chair; Senator Cheryl Kagan, Vice Chair and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

FROM: Rev. Chip Tucker, member of the Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network (MEPPN)

DATE: March 3, 2026

The Episcopal Church affirms that no community, especially communities living in poverty, should bear the heaviest burden of environmental pollution or degradation. For too long, certain Maryland neighborhoods—often low-income communities and communities of color—have carried a disproportionate share of pollution, illness, and environmental risk. These are places where asthma rates are higher, where hazardous facilities cluster, and where families live with the cumulative weight of stressors that would never be tolerated elsewhere. SB 781 finally acknowledges that reality and responds with tools equal to the challenge.

This bill does something both simple and transformative: it requires the Department of the Environment to look at the *whole picture* when evaluating permits in at-risk census tracts. Not just one element - but the cumulative burden borne by real people. It ensures that new or expanded pollution cannot be approved if it worsens already inequitable conditions unless there is truly compelling public interest. And it strengthens public participation so that residents most affected have a meaningful voice in decisions that shape their health.

As people of faith, we believe this bill reflects our shared moral responsibility. It aligns with the conviction that every Marylander deserves clean air, safe water, and a healthy environment, regardless of ZIP code.

The Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network (MEPPN) is a ministry of The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland, The Episcopal Diocese of Washington, and The Delaware-Maryland Synod ELCA



SB 781 does not halt economic activity. It simply ensures that growth does not come at the expense of those who have already borne more than their share. It brings transparency, accountability, and fairness to a permitting system that has too often overlooked cumulative harm.

For the sake of public health, environmental justice, and the dignity of every community in our state, **the Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network (MEPPN) requests a FAVORABLE report.**