

**Testimony Supporting SB0781**  
**Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee**  
**March 3, 2026**

**Position: SUPPORT**

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Carlos Sanchez, and I am a resident of Baltimore City and a member of the South Baltimore Community Land Trust, a grassroots nonprofit organization. I am writing to express my strong support for SB0781, the CHERISH Our Communities Act applying to MDE-issued permits.

As someone who lives in a community on the front lines of polluting industry, I have witnessed the cumulative effects of industrial activity in South Baltimore for years. Our neighborhoods are surrounded by major roadways, industrial facilities, waste sites, and other pollution sources that contribute to toxic air and environmental degradation. These impacts are not theoretical. They show up in our emergency rooms, in our schools, and in our homes — through higher rates of asthma, cardiovascular disease, and other chronic health conditions that disproportionately affect low-income communities and communities of color.

SB0781 takes an essential step toward addressing this long-standing environmental injustice by incorporating consideration of cumulative impacts into Maryland's permitting decisions. Other states, including New Jersey, Minnesota, and New York, have already passed similar laws. New Jersey's law has moved into implementation and successfully withstood legal challenges from polluting industry interests. Maryland has the opportunity to follow these proven models and ensure that our most overburdened communities are no longer treated as sacrifice zones.

This legislation is both geographically and practically targeted. It applies only to communities identified as bearing disproportionate pollution burdens. It applies only to a defined set of permits — primarily certain air pollution permits, a narrow category of water pollution permits, and waste disposal permits. It will not impact most businesses, housing developments, or general construction projects unless the project itself is a significant polluting facility.

Importantly, SB0781 corrects a major gap in public participation. Currently, nearby residents have no opportunity to comment on several types of permits to pollute, including more than half of air pollution permits. This bill guarantees meaningful public input before decisions are made that directly affect our health and quality of life.

The bill also ensures accountability. It prevents new polluting facilities from being built in overburdened communities if the Maryland Department of the Environment determines — through a deliberative public process — that the facility would contribute to disproportionate pollution and health burdens. For existing facilities seeking permit renewals, it provides tools to reduce pollution if the agency determines the facility is contributing to cumulative harm.

For far too long, communities like mine in South Baltimore have carried the weight of pollution without having a real voice in the decisions that shape our environment. SB0781 provides a thoughtful, data-driven framework to protect public health where it is needed most, while maintaining a targeted and practical approach.

I respectfully urge you to vote in favor of SB0781. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Carlos Sanchez-Gonzalez  
The South Baltimore Community Land Trust