



**Committee:** Education, Energy, and the Environment  
**Testimony:** Senate Bills 780/781 – CHERISH Our Communities Act  
**Organization:** Jewish Community Relations Council of Howard County, MD  
**Submitting:** Laura Salganik, Chair  
**Position:** FAVORABLE  
**Hearing Date:** March 3, 2026

Dear Chairman Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and Committee Members:

The Jewish Community Relations Council of Howard County is submitting this testimony in favor of both SB 780 and SB 781, Cherish Our Communities Act. As Jews, we are obligated to try and repair the world (tikkun olam) and by supporting these bills, we demonstrate our commitment to advancing our Jewish values in the interest of protecting overburdened communities.

Together, SB 780 and SB 781 will identify and help mitigate detrimental impacts of the decades long practice of constructing major highways, and siting landfills, hazardous waste facilities, incinerators, industrial plants and other pollution facilities in or near communities of color and low-income communities.

These paired environmental justice bills will correct widely acknowledged flaws in both the Maryland Department of Environment’s permitting program and the Public Service Commission’s approval process for siting polluting electric generating stations. By failing to consider the total existing facilities in already overburdened communities, the government approval process largely ignores the severe impacts of additional risk to already challenged neighborhoods.

SB 781 would add new Maryland Department of the Environment permitting requirements for facilities in census tracts with pollution risk/environmental justice scores at or above the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile. These requirements would include enhanced notice of public participation opportunities and submission of a report to document baseline understanding of risk, disparities and environmental needs or a “BURDEN” report.

SB 780 calls for similar requirements in the Public Service Commission’s Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (CPCN) thus strengthening the approval process for polluting electric generating stations. Together, SB780 and SB781 will provide needed protection for Maryland’s communities overburdened by pollution.

**We respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB 780 and SB 781.**