



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Testimony in Support of SB 781 CHERISH Our Communities Act

TO: Chair Feldman and Members of the
Education, Energy and Environment Committee
FROM: Phil Webster, PhD, Lead Advocate for the Climate
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland.
DATE: March 3, 2026

The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland (UULM-MD) strongly supports **SB 781 - 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)**

The UULM-MD is a faith-based advocacy organization based on Unitarian Universalist (UU) Values, including Interdependence (honoring the interdependent web of all existence) and Justice (where all feel welcome and can thrive). Working to mitigate, adapt to, and build resilience for climate change is central to our beliefs.

The **CHERISH our Communities Act** has been around for more than ten years, in one form or another. Originally introduced in 2014, it is based on a simple premise: *Enough (pollution) Is Enough*. The bill would require adequate environmental impact assessments for new, renewed, and expanded environmental permits to ensure that environmental justice (EJ) communities do not continue to disproportionately bear the harms of environmental and public health hazards.

In 2022, "overburdened" and "underserved" communities were officially defined in Maryland law, targeting areas hit hardest by environmental and economic challenges. Also in 2022, "Justice 40 language" was included in the Joint Chairmen's Report (JCR) from the legislative budget committees to request information from Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) on recommendations to identify and provide assistance to overburdened communities, legislative & regulatory changes to direct at least 40% of funding from critical programs to community needs. The Maryland EJ Screening tool has been developed to identify census tracts with high Environmental Justice scores.

The CHERISH Our Communities Act builds on this foundation by giving the MDE the authority to use the "EJ Score" when evaluating new, renewed, and expanded environmental permits.

We urge a FAVORABLE report on **SB 781**.

Phil Webster, PhD

Lead Advocate for the Climate, UULM-MD

UULM-MD c/o UU Church of Annapolis 333 Dubois Road Annapolis, MD 21401 410-266-8044,

www.uulmmd.org info@uulmmd.org www.facebook.com/uulmmd www.Twitter.com/uulmmd

UULM-MD c/o UU Church of Annapolis 333 Dubois Road Annapolis, MD 21401 410-266-8044,

www.uulmmd.org info@uulmmd.org www.facebook.com/uulmmd www.Twitter.com/uulmmd