



TESTIMONY TO: SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

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)

POSITION: Support

BY: Linda T. Kohn, President

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland supports policies that protect our planet and promote public health. The League believes that advancing environmental justice is essential to creating an equitable and sustainable future for all Marylanders.

The League of Women Voters of Maryland **supports SB 781**, the CHERISH Our Communities Act, which applies to permits issued by the Maryland Department of the Environment. SB 781 would require the Department to consider cumulative environmental and public health impacts when issuing permits in communities that are disproportionately burdened by pollution. Additionally, this bill would protect at-risk communities from new facilities that would further contribute to the disproportionate pollution and health burdens they are subject to.

Under Maryland's current process, impacted communities are being left out of the conversation while decisions that directly affect their health and wellbeing are being made. For many types of pollution permits, nearby communities currently have no opportunity to submit public comments. *This is unacceptable.* The League believes that the public has a right to know about the pollution in their communities, and that the public has a right to participate in the decision-making process at every level. The CHERISH Our Communities Act would address the historical injustice that Maryland's overburdened and underserved communities continue to experience by ensuring they have a voice in the permitting process.

Overburdened and underserved communities - namely low-income communities and communities of color - disproportionately bear the brunt of pollution and its associated health impacts. Projects that degrade air and water quality are often placed in these overburdened and underserved census tracts, perpetuating inequities in opportunity and health outcomes. **SB 781** would work to protect these communities from further environmental injustice at the hands of the state's permitting process.

The League of Women Voters of Maryland **strongly urges a favorable report on SB 781.**