



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

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee,

As a resident of District 42B and the President of 17 for Peace and Justice, UMD's environmental justice student organization, I am writing to express my strong support for SB0781, the CHERISH Our Communities Act, applying to MDE-issued permits.

I am a member of the State Action Committee for 17 for Peace and Justice, which is UMD's only environmental justice student organization. Our committee mobilizes college students to push for stronger state-level environmental legislation. We have been working closely with the CHERISH Act coalition to pass this bill.

As students at the University of Maryland, College Park, we are directly impacted by the environmental justice and health impacts of polluting facilities in Maryland. Our students hail from all different parts of Maryland, including Howard County, Baltimore County, Baltimore City, Anne Arundel County, Prince George's County, and more. At UMD, we are located in Prince George's County, which has the 3rd highest density of power plants of all counties in Maryland.

The current system of permitting in Maryland may seem like a facially neutral policy, but in reality, perpetuates the historic and systemic racism that has occurred in Maryland. Permits that only consider environmental impact and not cumulative impacts or demographics treat these issues as a vacuum. However, it's important to recognize that these issues are cumulative and should be considered together. The CHERISH Act addresses this by considering cumulative impacts into Maryland's process of issuing permits to pollute, based on laws already passed in New Jersey, Minnesota, and New York. New Jersey's bill has already gone into implementation and won against a legal challenge from polluting industry interests.

As young residents of Maryland and students at our state's flagship university, we are deeply concerned about the environmental justice and health impacts that the pollution industry has on Maryland residents, especially marginalized and frontline communities who suffer disproportionately. Protecting our communities from the pollution industry is essential for the long term resilience of our state and to ensure a just and equitable future.



This bill prevents new polluters from being built in environmental justice communities if the Maryland Department of the Environment determines, through a deliberative public process with public input, that allowing it to be built would contribute to a disproportionate pollution and health burden on the nearby community. It will also reduce pollution from existing facilities when their permits are being renewed, if MDE determines that the facility is contributing to a disproportionate pollution and health burden on the nearby community.

We hope that you will work to pass SB0781 and consider the future of our health and environment to vote favorably for the CHERISH Act.

Sincerely,

Michelle Wang

President of 17 for Peace and Justice

University of Maryland, College Park '2027