



OUT FOR JUSTICE

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 780:

TO: Education, Energy, and Environment Committee

FROM: Out For Justice, Inc.

DATE: 3/3/2026

Good Afternoon Chair Feldman and Members of the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee:

My name is Neka Duckett-Randolph, and I am the resident environmentalist at Out For Justice, a member-led grassroots organization dedicated to engaging, educating, and empowering communities to build power to dismantle harmful systems of oppression. Out for Justice strongly supports SB780, the CHERISH Act.

As an organization that has long advocated for the rights and dignity of individuals impacted by the criminal justice system, **Out For Justice** proudly stands at the intersection of **environmental justice** and **criminal justice reform**. The carceral system and environmental injustice are not separate, isolated issues. They are inextricably linked, particularly for impoverished communities of color, and, more specifically, Black communities. We understand the carceral community is a **frontline environmental justice community**. Black and Brown individuals who have been criminalized—especially those from within Baltimore’s Black Butterfly neighborhoods —often face compounded environmental hazards, both within and outside the prison walls.

Across our state residents experience firsthand the consequences of environmental degradation. Flooding worsened by unchecked development, declining air quality near industrial sites, and contaminated waterways are not abstract environmental concerns; they are daily public safety issues. When stormwater systems fail, families lose homes. When air pollution increases, asthma rates rise. When water systems are compromised, public health emergencies follow.

Environmental degradation destabilizes communities. It increases emergency response burdens, strains healthcare systems, depresses property values, and disproportionately harms low-income and historically marginalized communities. Public safety must be understood not only as crime prevention, but as protection from preventable harm.

Community input is essential to addressing these challenges effectively. Residents possess critical, localized knowledge about flooding patterns, pollution exposure, infrastructure weaknesses, and cumulative environmental impacts. Without structured and meaningful opportunities for community participation, state-level decisions risk overlooking real-world conditions on the ground.

SB780 provides an important opportunity to formalize and strengthen community engagement in environmental processes. Transparent decision-making builds public trust. Inclusive participation improves policy outcomes. And proactive environmental stewardship reduces the likelihood of costly disasters and emergency interventions later.

When communities are heard early and often:

- Projects are better designed.
- Environmental risks are more accurately assessed.
- Public opposition decreases.
- Implementation becomes more efficient and equitable.

Maryland has long positioned itself as a leader in environmental protection. Protecting the health of the Chesapeake Bay and strengthening climate resilience efforts demonstrate the state's recognition that environmental policy and public safety are inseparable. SB780 continues that legacy by ensuring that those most affected by environmental decisions have a voice in shaping them.

Public safety is not only about responding to emergencies, it is about preventing them.

Environmental degradation, left unchecked and unexamined by impacted communities, increases risks that are avoidable with thoughtful planning and inclusive governance.

Strengthening community input mechanisms is not merely a procedural improvement, it is a public safety imperative.

For these reasons, Out For Justice respectfully urges a favorable report on SB780.