



March 11, 2026

The Honorable Marc Korman
Chair, House Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251, House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: House Bill 1268 – Environmental Permits – Requirements for Burden Analysis, Issuance and Renewal, and Public Participation (CHERISH Our Communities Act)

Dear Chair Korman:

The Maryland State Council on Cancer Control (Council) respectfully submits this letter of support for House Bill 1268 (HB 1268), which would strengthen environmental permitting requirements in at-risk census tracts by requiring cumulative burden analyses, enhanced public participation, and explicit consideration of environmental and public health stressors before permit issuance or renewal.

HB 1268 represents a meaningful and evidence-informed step toward reducing environmental exposures that contribute to cancer and other chronic diseases, particularly in communities that have historically borne disproportionate environmental burdens.

Addressing Environmental Contributors to Cancer and Chronic Disease

Environmental exposures, including air pollutants, hazardous air toxics, proximity to waste facilities, contaminated water sources, and cumulative industrial emissions, are well-documented contributors to cancer risk. HB 1268 requires applicants for certain covered individual environmental permits in at-risk census tracts to prepare a burden report that evaluates existing environmental and public health stressors, as well as the potential additional impact of proposed or renewed permits.

By explicitly requiring analysis of cumulative impacts and environmental justice scores, the bill strengthens the State's ability to identify and mitigate environmental conditions that increase cancer risk and other chronic disease burdens.

Recognizing Disproportionate Impacts in Overburdened Communities

Cancer incidence and mortality are not evenly distributed across Maryland. Communities with higher exposure to particulate matter, diesel exhaust, hazardous air pollutants, and proximity to industrial facilities often experience higher rates of respiratory disease, cardiovascular disease, and certain cancers. These same communities frequently include higher proportions of low-income residents, communities of color, and individuals with limited access to preventive health services.



HB 1268 centers environmental justice by requiring the Maryland Department of the Environment to determine whether permit approvals would cause or contribute to adverse environmental or public health stressors in an at-risk tract that are higher than those borne by other areas within the State.

This framework aligns with the Council's longstanding commitment to reducing cancer disparities and advancing equitable prevention strategies.

Strengthening Transparency, Public Participation, and Accountability

Public participation and transparent decision-making are essential components of effective environmental health policy. HB 1268 enhances notice, comment opportunities, and the inclusion of burden reports and determinations in the record for judicial review.

These provisions ensure that affected communities have meaningful opportunities to engage in decisions that directly impact their environmental and public health conditions.

Aligning With Maryland's Comprehensive Cancer Control Priorities

The Council supports policies that reduce modifiable cancer risk factors and address upstream drivers of health inequities. Environmental conditions are a critical upstream determinant of cancer risk. By requiring cumulative burden analysis, strengthening permit review standards, and centering the health of at-risk communities, HB 1268 advances prevention-focused, equity-driven cancer control strategies in Maryland.

For these reasons, the Maryland State Council on Cancer Control supports HB 1268 and respectfully urges the House Environment and Transportation Committee to give the bill favorable consideration.

Thank you for your leadership and continued commitment to public health and cancer prevention in Maryland.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Taofeek Owonikoko".

Taofeek Owonikoko, MD
Chair
Maryland State Council on Cancer Control