



HoCoClimateAction.org
Howard County, Maryland

Testimony: HB1268 – 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)

Hearing Date: March 13, 2026

Bill Sponsor: Delegate Behler

Committee: Environment and Transportation

Submitting: Shari Glenn for Howard County Climate Action

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Korman, Vice Chair Guyton and Committee Members,

[HoCo Climate Action](#) is a [350.org](#) local chapter and a grassroots organization representing approximately 1,400 subscribers. We are also a member of the [Climate Justice Wing](#) of the [Maryland Legislative Coalition](#). Our organization works with residents and ally organizations to promote a safe climate and clean energy future. Specifically, we have worked extensively on clean energy and on building electrification to help Maryland achieve its ambitious climate goals, including net-zero emissions.

We urge you to vote favorably on HB1268. The CHERISH Our Communities Act will reform Maryland's system of issuing permits to pollute to protect community health against environmental injustice.

HB1268 would require a new application or renewal for an environmental permit for a facility located in an at-risk census tract to include a report describing the environmental and public health burdens and require the Department of the Environment (MDE) to issue a determination as to whether approving the permit will cause or contribute to adverse environmental or public health stressors. In short, the bill will require MDE to take environmental justice scores, cumulative pollution burden, and public input into account when making decisions whether to issue or renew a permit for an industrial source. Given the experience of Maryland's overburdened communities, this bill will provide a way for MDE to better evaluate future permits and permit renewals.

Currently, the state must take public comments and hold public hearings for many types of permits - but many of the permits with the biggest impacts on environmental justice communities are left out, including some types of air pollution permits and waste disposal permits. This means that communities usually don't get the opportunity to make their voices heard. The CHERISH Act requires a public comment process on these permits for the first time, improving the community's opportunity to shape decisions.

The CHERISH Act ensures that the state gets the information needed to make an informed decision on a permit by providing Baseline Understanding of Risk, Disparities, and Environmental Needs (BURDEN) Report: a data-driven report tailored to the situation.

The CHERISH Act requires that new or expanding facilities that would make pollution worse in an already overburdened community will be barred from getting their permits to pollute, and facilities that already contribute too much pollution must reduce their emissions.

Everyone in Maryland deserves access to clean air and water, and healthy outdoor spaces. The CHERISH Act is in direct alignment with environmental justice goals set forth in Maryland's Climate Pollution Reduction plan and in MDE's Climate Implementation Plan.

For these reasons, we **support HB1268** and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report.

Howard County Climate Action

Submitted by Shari Glenn,, Steering and Advocacy Committee

www.HoCoClimateAction.org

HoCoClimateAction@gmail.com