

**Testimony Supporting HB1268 & HB1287**  
**House Environment and Transportation (ENT) Committee**  
**March 13, 2026**

**Position: SUPPORT / FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Korman, Vice Chair Guyton, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit **favorable** testimony for the record in support of **HB1268 & HB1287–the CHERISH Our Communities Act**. The undersigned are 44 undergraduate students, graduate students, and postdoctoral researchers in the Department of Environmental Health and Engineering (EHE) at Johns Hopkins University (JHU). Our scholarship spans both the Bloomberg School of Public Health and the Whiting School of Engineering at JHU. Through technical and applied training, we develop expertise in cumulative risk assessment, evaluation of chemical mixture exposures, and the fenceline community and occupational health effects of pollution, along with other essential competencies to protect and promote environmental and occupational health. The opinions expressed herein are our own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Johns Hopkins University. Based on our collective experience and training, **we write to you in strong support of HB1268 & HB1287–the CHERISH Our Communities Act.**

The CHERISH Act is community-led legislation rooted in the legacy of environmental justice action here in Maryland to protect frontline communities from the cumulative impacts of pollution. We assert and discuss further herein that the CHERISH Act is a health-protective and well-designed bill which:

- 1) Translates community testimony directly into responsive regulatory action and improved opportunities for meaningful public participation;*
- 2) Aligns with the state of public and environmental health science; and*
- 3) Is informed by the state of environmental regulatory practice as demonstrated in multiple other states and jurisdictions.*

***1) Translates community testimony directly into responsive regulatory action and improved opportunities for meaningful public participation.***

From the neighboring communities of industrial poultry production in the Eastern Shore of Maryland, to the residents at the frontline of a myriad of stationary and mobile industrial polluters in South Baltimore, and elsewhere in our state, residents in fenceline communities have reported the disproportionate health and quality of life burdens of pollution for decades.<sup>1-7</sup> The CHERISH Act is focused in such areas, applying only to communities

identified as overburdened by environmental pollution and compounding non-chemical stressors using the MDEnviroScreen EJ Score.<sup>8</sup>

Currently, there are multiple permit application processes that residents cannot provide any input on, even though such permits may allow polluters to poison these residents' backyards. More than half of MD air pollution permits have **no** required public comment periods or hearings for potentially impacted community members to have their voices heard and valued. The CHERISH Act addresses this by expanding public participation processes for permit applications and renewals currently without them in geographic areas covered by the Act.

## ***2) Aligns with the state of public and environmental health science.***

The science is clear and unequivocal: air, water, and land pollution are core drivers of community and individual-level mortality and morbidity, and these health impacts can amplify or be amplified by socioeconomic and structural harms.<sup>9-14</sup> Air pollution and heavy metal contamination, for instance, have been linked to increased cancer risk, neurodevelopmental and psychosocial harms, and respiratory and cardiovascular disease.<sup>11,15-19</sup> Both environmental exposures and structural burdens are borne disproportionately in communities of color and communities with lower wealth. Residents in these impacted areas have described and reported this for decades, and the science is aligning with the lived understanding of how environmental exposures interact with non-chemical stressors.

The CHERISH Act will require applicants of specific permits to submit a **Baseline Understanding of Risk, Disparities, And Environmental Needs** or **BURDEN Report** using already existing and publicly accessible data for evaluation of additional environmental or health burdens in already at-risk areas. The majority of BURDEN Report data inputs are readily available in the MDEnviroScreen Tool and the remainder are already expected for a permit application, ensuring a quick and straightforward process to develop the BURDEN Report. Members of our student/postdoctoral research body are committed to supporting this methodology development process and communication using our environmental health expertise.

## ***3) Is informed by the state of environmental regulatory practice as demonstrated in multiple other states and jurisdictions.***

The current environmental regulatory regime in Maryland issues permits to individual facilities without consideration of that facility's contribution to the combined impacts of multiple polluters in a single area. By and large, these areas are communities of color and communities of lower wealth due to the entrenched histories of redlining and inequitable zoning and land use practices.<sup>20,21</sup> Multiple states and city-level jurisdictions around the United States (e.g., New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Chicago) have passed

and implemented cumulative impacts legislation to meet the on-the-ground and scientifically-informed realities of pollution. For example, New Jersey's Environmental Justice Law on cumulative impacts is in implementation and has already won against legal challenges from polluting industry interests.<sup>22,23</sup> There is already a clear track record nationally of implementing legislation to better protect impacted communities, codify environmental justice commitments (i.e., Gov. Wes Moore singing Valuing Opportunity, Inclusion, and Community Equity [VOICE] Executive Order in 2025)<sup>24,25</sup>, and hold polluters accountable.

The CHERISH Act 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 also will reduce pollution from existing facilities when their permits are being renewed, if MDE determines that facility is contributing to a disproportionate pollution and health burden on the nearby community.

Right now, Maryland has a critical opportunity to be a champion for environmental health and justice, particularly in a national landscape when champions are needed more than ever. Thank you again for this opportunity and **we urge a favorable report on HB1268 & HB1287—the CHERISH Our Communities Act.**

Sincerely,

**Matthew A. Aubourg, MSPH** – PhD in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Elizabeth A. Chatpar, ScM** – PhD in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Olivia M. Ventresca** – MS in Occupational and Environmental Hygiene, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Harshitha Lingegowda, MBBS** – ScM in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Erin E. Bennett, MPH** – PhD in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Hannah Greene, BA** – MHS in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Shilpi Misra, MPH** – PhD in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Sonia Dhawan, MPH** – PhD in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Morgan K Steiner, BS** – PhD in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Gabriela Sarmiento, MSPH** – PhD in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Rebecca Shade, MHS** – PhD in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Grant Tore, MPH** – PhD in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Andrew C. Vargas, BS** – PhD in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Shifali Mathews, MPH** – PhD in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Katherine M. Marquess, PhD, MA, MPH** – PhD in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Natalie S. Armstrong, MHS** – PhD in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**William S. Daniels, PhD** – Postdoctoral Researcher, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Whiting School of Engineering

**Charles Bakin, MS** – PhD in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Dionne Mitcham, MPH** – PhD in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Megan Simonsen** – PhD in Environmental Engineering, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Whiting School of Engineering

**Julianne Chan** – PhD in Environmental Engineering, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Whiting School of Engineering

**Zachary T. Kralles, PhD** – Postdoctoral Researcher, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Whiting School of Engineering

**Ayreanna Pettijohn, BS** – PhD in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Mei-Li Hey, MS** – PhD in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Rashida Callender, MPH** – PhD in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Oscar Lopez, MPH** – PhD in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Brittany Brown, PhD** – Postdoctoral Researcher, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Daniel Ukaegbu, B.EMT** – PhD in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Dylan C. Gaeta, PhD** – PhD in Geography and Environmental Engineering, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Whiting School of Engineering

**Shayna Demick** – ScM in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Isabella Umali-Grawe** – MHS Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Hyomin Lee, M.S.** – PhD in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Corina Mills** – MHS Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Salvatore Milletich, MPH** – PhD in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Biak Tial, MSc** – PhD in Health Security, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Gianna Murphy** – BS in Environmental Engineering, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Whiting School of Engineering

**Janelle Larsen, MS** – MS in Environmental Engineering, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Whiting School of Engineering

**Kathryn Brinkman** – MS in Toxicology for Human Risk Assessment, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Sanaa Dixon** – BS in Environmental Engineering, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Whiting School of Engineering

**Juny Lee** – BS in Environmental Engineering, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Whiting School of Engineering

**Loren Ayers, BS** – ScM in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**David Park** – PhD in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Alex Rittenhouse** – MD-PhD in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

**Tabassum Mehnaz** – ScM in Environmental Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

---

## **References**

1. South Baltimore Community Land Trust. From Toxic Disasters to Displacement: 100 Years of Environmental Injustice in South Baltimore. 2023. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uWuid0Jr\\_9Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uWuid0Jr_9Y)
2. Payan M, Armus M. Maryland must curb Eastern Shore factory farm pollution | GUEST COMMENTARY. 2025. <https://www.baltimoresun.com/2025/08/26/maryland-farm-pollution-eastern-shore/>
3. Cox J. Activists sound health alarms on poultry houses. 2015. <https://www.delmarvanow.com/story/news/local/maryland/2015/06/06/delmarva-health-poultry/28622573/>
4. Hall J, Galarraga J, Berman I, et al. Environmental Injustice and Industrial Chicken Farming in Maryland. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2021;18(21):11039. doi:10.3390/ijerph182111039
5. Kelleher S. As Trump promotes coal, no respite for communities choking on the industry's dust. December 16, 2025. <https://www.thenewlede.org/2025/12/as-trump-promotes-coal-no-respite-for-communities-choking-on-the-industrys-dust/>
6. Costello D, Opilo E, Anderson J, Price L. Explosion in Curtis Bay CSX coal silo shakes Baltimore, but so far no injuries reported, officials say. The Baltimore Sun. December 30, 2021. <https://www.baltimoresun.com/2021/12/30/explosion-in-curtis-bay-csx-coal-silo-shakes-baltimore-but-so-far-no-injuries-reported-officials-say/>
7. Aubourg MA, Sawtell G, Deanes L, et al. Community-driven research and capacity building to address environmental justice concerns with industrial air pollution in Curtis Bay, South Baltimore. *Front Epidemiol*. 2023;3:1198321. doi:10.3389/fepid.2023.1198321

8. Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE). MDEnviroScreen. 2025. Accessed October 2, 2025. [https://mde.maryland.gov/Environmental\\_Justice/Pages/MDEnviroScreen.aspx](https://mde.maryland.gov/Environmental_Justice/Pages/MDEnviroScreen.aspx)
9. Fan AM, Alexeeff G, Harris SB. Cumulative Risks and Cumulative Impacts of Environmental Chemical Exposures. *Int J Toxicol*. 2010;29(1):57-57. doi:10.1177/1091581809344224
10. Scammell MK, Montague P, Raffensperger C. Tools for Addressing Cumulative Impacts on Human Health and the Environment. *Environ Justice*. 2014;7(4):102-109. doi:10.1089/env.2014.0016
11. Padula AM, Rivera-Núñez Z, Barrett ES. Combined Impacts of Prenatal Environmental Exposures and Psychosocial Stress on Offspring Health: Air Pollution and Metals. *Curr Environ Health Rep*. 2020;7(2):89-100. doi:10.1007/s40572-020-00273-6
12. Tulse NS, Geller AM, Hagerthey S, et al. Challenges and opportunities for research supporting cumulative impact assessments at the United States environmental protection agency's office of research and development. *Lancet Reg Health - Am*. 2024;30:100666. doi:10.1016/j.lana.2023.100666
13. Committee on State-of-the-Science and the Future of Cumulative Impact Assessment, Board on Environmental Studies and Toxicology, Division on Earth and Life Studies, National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. *State of the Science and the Future of Cumulative Impact Assessment*. National Academies Press; 2025:29182. doi:10.17226/29182
14. Lee C, Mohai P, Cunningham M. Reducing Concentrated Environmental Burden: Addressing Cumulative Impacts in Government Decision Making. *Environ Justice*. 2025;18(6):357-365. doi:10.1177/19394071251398548
15. Mayntz SP, Rosenbech KE, Mohamed RA, et al. Impact of air pollution and noise exposure on cardiovascular disease incidence and mortality: A systematic review. *Heliyon*. 2024;10(21):e39844. doi:10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e39844
16. Chari R, Burke TA, White RH, Fox MA. Integrating Susceptibility into Environmental Policy: An Analysis of the National Ambient Air Quality Standard for Lead. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2012;9(4):1077-1096. doi:10.3390/ijerph9041077
17. Robinson ES, Yassine A, Agarwal S, et al. Total cancer risk estimates from measured concentrations of volatile organic compounds in industrialized southeastern Louisiana. *Proc Natl Acad Sci*. 2025;122(41):e2504770122. doi:10.1073/pnas.2504770122
18. Payne-Sturges DC, Taiwo TK, Ellickson K, et al. Disparities in Toxic Chemical Exposures and Associated Neurodevelopmental Outcomes: A Scoping Review and Systematic Evidence Map of the Epidemiological Literature. *Environ Health Perspect*. 2023;131(9):096001. doi:10.1289/EHP11750

19. Henneman L, Choirat C, Dedoussi I, Dominici F, Roberts J, Zigler C. Mortality risk from United States coal electricity generation. *Science*. 2023;382(6673):941-946. doi:10.1126/science.adf4915
20. Estien CO, Wilkinson CE, Morello-Frosch R, Schell CJ. Historical Redlining Is Associated with Disparities in Environmental Quality across California. *Environ Sci Technol Lett*. 2024;11(2):54-59. doi:10.1021/acs.estlett.3c00870
21. Huang SJ, Sehgal NJ. Association of historic redlining and present-day health in Baltimore. Liu SY, ed. *PLOS ONE*. 2022;17(1):e0261028. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0261028
22. Earthjustice. Victory: NJ Appellate Court Affirms Legality of Environmental Justice Law. January 5, 2026. <https://earthjustice.org/press/2026/victory-nj-appellate-court-affirms-legality-of-environmental-justice-law>
23. Sheats N, Baptista AI, Lopez-Nunez M, Miles M. They Said It Couldn't Be Done: A Case Study of New Jersey's Landmark Environmental Justice Law (S. 232). *Environ Justice*. 2025;18(6):366-373. doi:10.1177/19394071251392461
24. The Office of Governor Wes Moore. Governor Moore Signs Executive Order to Advance Environmental Justice for Communities Burdened by Pollution. July 18, 2025. Accessed October 13, 2025. <https://governor.maryland.gov/news/press/pages/governor-moore-signs-eo-to-advance-environmental-justice-for-communities.aspx>
25. Governor Wes Moore. *EXECUTIVE ORDER 01.01.2025.17: Valuing Opportunity, Inclusion, and Community Equity (VOICE)*. 2025. Accessed October 13, 2025. [https://governor.maryland.gov/Lists/ExecutiveOrders/Attachments/89/EO%2001.01.2025.17%20Valuing%20Opportunity,%20Inclusion,%20and%20Community%20Equity%20\(VOICE\)\\_Accessible.pdf](https://governor.maryland.gov/Lists/ExecutiveOrders/Attachments/89/EO%2001.01.2025.17%20Valuing%20Opportunity,%20Inclusion,%20and%20Community%20Equity%20(VOICE)_Accessible.pdf)