

Written Testimony in Favor of 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)

March 11, 2026

To: Chair Korman, Vice Chair Guyton, and Members of the Economic and Transportation Committee

I am submitting testimony in favor of HB1268, one of two bills that comprise the CHERISH Our Communities Act. The second and complementary bill is HB1287.

Together, these two bills protect vulnerable communities in Maryland from health-harming pollution. People living in Maryland's most polluted communities deserve state protections that prioritize human health. These two bills will extend equity and equal attention to good health to all state residents. In a time of rising healthcare costs, the disease-preventing impact of these measures will provide significant economic and fiscal benefits for Maryland.

As a community advocate who has worked directly with minority and vulnerable communities, I know that polluting facilities have disproportionately impacted the health of residents of these communities. This is an opportunity for policies that address health disparities to be put in place. These two bills combined will help lead to better health for these communities, and will lead to greater attention in general to health-harming practices throughout all of Maryland.

The CHERISH Our Communities Act was developed by frontline communities in Maryland based on years of navigating Maryland's permitting system and working to protect their communities from pollution. It takes lessons learned from successful bills passed in New Jersey, Minnesota, and New York. In communities in the state disproportionately burdened by pollution, it ensures that residents have a voice in the permitting process, state agencies gain the information and analysis they need to make informed permitting decisions, and communities are protected from disproportionate levels of pollution that harm their health. This targeted and tailored approach will protect communities from polluting development while allowing positive community development to thrive.

HB1268 will apply these principles to permits issued by the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE), while the complementary HB1287 will do the same for permits issued by the Public Service Commission (PSC). Passage of both bills will help every community in Maryland be a healthy place to live.

Please give a favorable report on HB1268.

Sincerely,

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