

Testimony Supporting HB1268
House Environment and Transportation Committee
March 13, 2026

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chair Korman and Members of the Committee,

As a Baltimore City resident of District 43A and an environmental health professional, I am writing to express my **strong** support of HB1268, the CHERISH Our Communities Act applying to MDE-issued permits.

I am a climate and environmental health professional with over 7 years of experience in the environmental justice and public health fields. I hold a Masters of Public Health in Environmental & Occupational Health from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and a Bachelors of Science in environmental policy from Georgetown University. I have extensive experience supporting community organizations with environmental justice initiatives and movements in both Baltimore and Washington, DC. **Based on my academic and professional research on effective tactics, strategies, and processes that academic researchers can use to uplift environmental justice in communities and support environmental justice movements, I strongly support the passage of the CHERISH Our Communities Act.**

By considering the cumulative impacts of pollution in the most marginalized, at-risk, and vulnerable neighborhoods in the city that have been ignored and polluted in for decades, the CHERISH Our Communities Act will begin to repair the harm caused and protect public health from those who have contributed the least to pollution in Maryland. Today, Black, Brown, immigrant, rural, and working-class neighborhoods are forced to bear much of the burden of pollution in the Maryland. As a resident of Baltimore, Maryland, I have seen firsthand the impact a lack of a cumulative impacts law has on Black and Brown communities in Baltimore. With my work organizing and conducting research with the South Baltimore Community Land Trust, I have seen the damage a lack of cumulative impacts legislation has done in South Baltimore and the harm it has caused to families. With a trash incinerator, a medical waste incinerator, a landfill, multiple industrial waste processing sites, and the largest open-air coal pile in the country located adjacent to homes and communities – with the coal pile sitting half a mile from the elementary school and recreation center – South Baltimore residents, predominantly Black, Brown, and working-class, experience disproportionately higher rates of asthma, cancer, and respiratory issues than their counterparts in whiter, more affluent areas of the city. The healthcare cost burden associated with the negative public health impacts of a lack of a cumulative impacts law is over \$58 million per year. As such, a central demand of environmental justice colleagues in South Baltimore is the passing of the CHERISH Our Communities Act that would enable the closing of existing polluting industries in the South Baltimore peninsula and prevent new, harmful industries from continuing to be cited next to poor, Black and Brown communities. **Without policies and laws that consider the compounding impacts of pollution on these neighborhoods, predominantly Black, Brown, rural, and immigrant neighborhoods in Maryland will continue to be dumped on.**

The CHERISH Our Communities Act will create a much stricter permitting process for polluting facilities in the District and close many of the existing permitting loopholes that allow facilities to operate next to communities and harm residents' health, especially Black, Brown, and immigrant residents. This bill incorporates consideration of cumulative impacts into Maryland's process of issuing permits to pollute, based on laws already passed in New Jersey, Minnesota, and New York. New Jersey's bill has already gone into implementation and won against a legal challenge from polluting industry interests. First and foremost, the Act will set up a process that requires specific industries applying for

permits, permit changes, and renewals to operate in Maryland to submit Burden Reports to show how their projects affect community and environmental health and wellbeing, on top of existing health impacts in the community, and what they are doing to mitigate harm. This will create much higher standards for which facilities are able to operate in Maryland neighborhoods, and especially in Black, Brown, rural, and immigrant neighborhoods. It is targeted in geography: it applies only to parts of the state that are burdened by disproportionate pollution. It is targeted in scope: it will apply to a specific list of types of permits, mostly air pollution permits, water pollution permits for a narrow list of types of industries, and waste disposal permits. It will not impact most businesses and will not impact housing or other construction (unless it is the construction of a facility that would pollute). Currently, nearby communities have no opportunity to give public comment on several types of permits to pollute, including more than half of air pollution permits. The CHERISH Our Communities Act will ensure public participation in the process and fix this longstanding environmental injustice. This bill 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.

Thank you, Delegates, for holding a hearing on such an important issue. **I strongly urge you to vote Yes on the CHERISH Our Communities Act to protect the environment and public health for Maryland residents and ensure Black, Brown, immigrant, and working-class neighborhoods in Maryland are no longer treated as dumping grounds. Make Maryland a leader in environmental justice nationwide and an example that other states and municipalities, such as Washington, DC, can use as a standard for future environmental justice and cumulative impacts laws.**