



Testimony in Support 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)

**House Environment and Transportation Committee
March 13, 2026**

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chair Korman and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of **ShoreRivers** and the communities we serve across Maryland's Eastern Shore, I respectfully submit this testimony in **strong support of HB1268, the CHERISH Our Communities Act**.

ShoreRivers works to protect and restore the waterways of Maryland's Eastern Shore, including the Chester, Choptank, Miles, Wye, and Sassafra rivers. Our rural communities within these watersheds depend on clean water for their health, livelihoods, and quality of life. Many of these same communities near industrial operations — including wastewater treatment plants, food processing plants, and concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs)— bear a disproportionate share of pollution impacts. **HB1268 takes an important step toward addressing these inequities by requiring the Maryland Department of the Environment to evaluate cumulative environmental and public health burdens when issuing or renewing certain pollution permits in communities that are already experiencing high levels of environmental stress.**

On the Eastern Shore, this approach is particularly important. Industrial-scale poultry production and the associated waste management systems can contribute to nutrient pollution, air emissions, and groundwater contamination that threaten both local communities and downstream waterways. Wastewater treatment plants, some which produce effluent and biosolids containing significant levels of PFAS and PFOAS may land-apply and irrigate farmland surrounding residential communities, allowing PFAS to accumulate in our environment and in well water. Food processing plants contribute to extreme nuisance smells, groundwater contamination and waterway pollution from the land application of food processing residuals. The cumulative impacts from the pollution each sector generates can degrade drinking water sources, harm aquatic life, and have a negative influence on public health.

ShoreRivers

Scott Budden, Executive Director

Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper | Matt Pluta, Choptank Riverkeeper
Ben Ford, Miles Wye Riverkeeper | Zack Kelleher, Sassafra Riverkeeper

shorerivers.org | 443.385.0511 | info@shorerivers.org



HB1268 would help ensure that these cumulative impacts are fully considered before new pollution sources are permitted or existing permits are renewed. **By requiring a “burden report” and environmental justice analysis for facilities located in at-risk communities, the bill gives regulators the tools they need to determine whether additional pollution would create unacceptable health and environmental burdens.**

This bill would also strengthen public participation in permitting decisions, ensuring that residents of affected communities have meaningful opportunities to review permit applications, understand potential impacts, and provide input before decisions are finalized. For many Eastern Shore communities that rely on private wells and live close to agricultural land, which receives much of the pollution mentioned earlier in this testimony, having a voice in these decisions is essential.

For our rivers, the benefits are clear. Stronger scrutiny of pollution permits can help prevent additional nutrient and waste discharges that contribute to algal blooms, fish kills, and degraded habitat in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Protecting local waterways ultimately supports the region’s fisheries, tourism, recreation, and cultural heritage.

HB1268 does not prohibit economic activity or agricultural production. Instead, it ensures that when new or expanded pollution sources are proposed in communities already experiencing significant environmental burdens, the state must carefully evaluate the impacts and prioritize public health and environmental protection. We thank the sponsors and the lead advocates who have championed this bill for years, and who have already made significant concessions in order to gain stakeholder consensus. We urge this committee to consider the bill as it is before you and make no further amendments. **For this bill to truly succeed in its goal, every industrial sector must be included - no exemptions.**

For these reasons, ShoreRivers respectfully urges the Committee to issue a **favorable report on HB1268, as written— no industry carveouts.**

Sincerely,

Annie Richards

Chester Riverkeeper, on behalf of ShoreRivers

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