

Testimony Supporting HB1268
House Environment and Transportation Committee Committee
March 11, 2026



Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

As a resident of Wicomico County, and a resident concerned about environmental justice in our rural community, I am writing to express my strong support of HB1268, the CHERISH Our Communities Act applying to MDE-issued permits.

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. 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.

As a neighbor to concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) and the polluting infrastructure associated with them, I understand firsthand what it's like to be unable to walk outside of my home without gagging. Members of my family have asthma, which is exacerbated when stenches from this pollution invade our home and property – it's important to me that our voices are heard before *more* polluting industries are sited in our community. CAFOs are pollution-intensive operations that have a negative impact on the environment and human health; **Maryland broiler production results in nearly 560 million pounds of litter annually, or more than 253,000 metric tons.** In rural areas, the cumulative impacts of these operations are devastating on the health, quality of life, and the peace of rural residents.

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.

On behalf of eastern shore communities, I urge you to support HB1268, ensuring public participation in rural communities like mine, and moving forward to protect the health and well-being of Marylanders.

Respectfully submitted,
Rachel Casteel
Sentinels of Eastern Shore Health (SESH)