

HB 1287 FAV

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)

Environment and Transportation

Hearing: March 10, 2026

Dear Committee Members,

The CHERISH Act ensures that the PSC obtains the data needed to make an informed decision on a permit, with a Baseline Understanding of Risk, Disparities, and Environmental Needs (BURDEN) Report. The Act also ensures that communities have a voice in the permitting process. The CHERISH Act is targeted and limited and applies best practices from similar legislation in other states.

Pollution negatively impacts health. Multiple, cumulative sources of pollution in the community increase cancer risk, shorten lifespans, and worsen overall health. Some communities in Maryland have faced this situation acutely and for far too long. The communities facing the most pollution in Maryland require additional state-level protections to prevent them from becoming exposed to even greater pollution and to reduce their current exposure. The CHERISH Act is the answer to this.

The CHERISH Act would address a critical gap in our environmental protection system. When multiple pollution sources combine, the harm can multiply. That often means even worse public health outcomes for areas bearing the burden of pollution. Maryland doesn't currently make permitting decisions for environmental justice considerations like these. Permits are considered in isolation, without evaluating the total, or cumulative, impact of surrounding permitted facilities or the socioeconomic status of nearby communities.

True environmental justice means putting community needs first, by considering factors like a community's existing pollution load and community health data when weighing permit decisions. This legislation would create a fairer system – one where community voices are part of permitting decisions that affect their health and well-being. In 2026, Maryland has an opportunity to show bold leadership and truly “leave no one behind.” It's a chance to align our values with real, actionable policy that protects vulnerable communities. It's time to respond to community demands and fix that.

The CHERISH Act would modernize Maryland's permitting system to more accurately affect people's lived experiences and protect communities that already face heavy pollution burdens.

I urge a favorable report.

Sincerely,

Maryrose Wilson

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