



Position: SUPPORT

Written Testimony for HB1268, the CHERISH Our Communities Act

Community of Curtis Bay Association

Dear Chair Korman and Members of the Committee,

As residents of South Baltimore and representatives of the Community of Curtis Bay Association, we write to express our strong support for **HB1268, the CHERISH Our Communities Act**, which applies to Maryland Department of the Environment-issued permits.

Our South Baltimore and northern Anne Arundel County neighborhoods — including Curtis Bay— have long carried a disproportionate share of Maryland’s most polluting and hazardous industrial facilities. We live alongside landfills, incinerators, coal export terminals, chemical plants, animal rendering operations, and heavy industrial sites. The cumulative impacts of these facilities are felt every day: coal dust in our schools, smoke and odors in our backyards, diesel truck traffic along residential streets, and air and water pollution that affect our health.

Sometimes these risks become visible in dramatic moments, such as the CSX Curtis Bay Coal Terminal explosion that shook our community, or the forty criminal counts brought against Curtis Bay Energy. Yet the larger, unaddressed threat is the **daily cumulative impact** of multiple polluting facilities operating side by side. This accumulation creates real health risks for our residents, reduces quality of life and economic opportunity, and increases systemic risk across the region.

Concentrating polluting facilities in communities with limited political voice and smaller populations does not just affect the immediate neighborhood. Facilities may cut corners when oversight is limited, and the consequences ripple outward — affecting air and water quality across multiple jurisdictions. **Distributing environmental risks and benefits more equitably makes the entire state safer and healthier.**

Marylanders across the state understand this principle, and we are united in this effort. We will not sacrifice one community or region for the benefit of another. We stand with rural Marylanders impacted by concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), and they stand with us. We stand with suburban and urban residents facing industrial pollution. We are all Marylanders, and we all deserve **healthy communities**.

The **CHERISH Our Communities Act** is designed to achieve this fairness. It:

- **Incorporates cumulative impact assessments** into Maryland’s permitting process, building on successful models in New Jersey, New York, and Minnesota.



- **Targets high-burden geographies**, applying only in communities that already face disproportionate pollution.
- **Targets high-impact permit types**, including specific air pollution permits, water discharge permits for certain industries, and waste disposal permits. It **does not impede housing or most business construction**, only facilities that generate pollution.
- **Ensures public participation**, allowing communities that live with these impacts to weigh in on permits that affect their health and environment. Currently, residents have no opportunity to comment on more than half of air pollution permits.
- **Prevents new polluters from being built** in environmental justice communities if MDE determines that a proposed facility would add to disproportionate health or pollution burdens. It also allows MDE to reduce pollution from existing facilities during permit renewals.

This legislation is a critical step toward protecting communities like Curtis Bay while creating a **more resilient, equitable, and healthier Maryland**. It balances economic development with public health, ensures meaningful community participation, and addresses decades of environmental injustice that have left certain neighborhoods bearing the brunt of industrial activity.

We strongly urge the Senate to pass **HB1268, the CHERISH Our Communities Act**.

Respectfully,

Community of Curtis Bay Association

www.ilovecurtisbay.com