



MARYLAND
LEAGUE OF
CONSERVATION
VOTERS

2025

The CHERISH Our Communities Act (SB 978 / HB 1484) FACT SHEET

Bill Sponsors: Senator Clarence Lam (District 12), Delegate Jazz Lewis (District 24)

BACKGROUND

The CHERISH Our Communities Act (Cumulative Harms to Environmental Restoration for Improving our Shared Health) addresses a critical gap in Maryland's environmental protection system. Currently, when considering new permits to pollute, Maryland does not evaluate how multiple pollution sources in one area combine to affect public health. This means new permits are reviewed in isolation, without considering the total (or cumulative) impact on local residents' health. Following the lead of states including New Jersey, New York, and Minnesota, the CHERISH Our Communities Act will reform Maryland's permitting system to better protect communities that already face heavy pollution burdens.

- Communities across Maryland face health risks from multiple pollution sources in their neighborhoods
- Many high-impact facilities currently avoid public notice requirements and transparency measures
- Maryland lacks the legal authority to make permitting decisions based on environmental justice data

WHAT THE ACT WILL DO

- Creates new permitting requirements for facilities that have the biggest impact on nearby communities
- Requires meaningful community engagement and public notice for all major pollution permits
- Ensures permits that would increase pollution in overburdened communities must include:
 - Strong conditions to reduce pollution impacts
 - Community benefits agreements to support local residents
- Gives Maryland Department of Environment clear authority to consider environmental justice when making permit decisions

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT FOR MARYLAND

The CHERISH Act puts Maryland at the forefront of environmental justice reform by addressing the combined effects of multiple polluters on community health. This reform ensures that neighborhoods already dealing with pollution burdens aren't forced to accept even more burdens without proper safeguards and benefits. This bill creates a fairer system where community voices matter in decisions that affect their health and well-being. By following proven models from other states, Maryland can protect its most vulnerable communities while providing clear guidelines for industry.



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Addressing the Effects of
Polluters on Community Health