


CHERISH Our Communities Act



from Cumulative Harms
to Environmental Restoration
for Improving our Shared Health

WHY DO WE NEED THE CHERISH ACT?

The CHERISH Our Communities Act will address the disproportionate environmental and public health harms that environmental justice communities in Maryland face from pollution generating facilities. For centuries, these facilities have been disproportionately and deliberately sited in minority and economically distressed communities in Maryland. Low-wealth, Black, and other communities of color in Maryland **face greater cancer risks and exposure to air toxics** due to higher pollution burden.

The CHERISH Our Communities Act amends Maryland's environmental law to provide adequate cumulative impact assessment and opportunities for public participation for new, renewed, and expanded environmental permits that are issued by the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE). Currently, many environmental permit applications do not even include a public engagement process, and do not take into consideration the cumulative harms posed by multiple and historic sources of pollution. The CHERISH Our Communities Act prioritizes Maryland residents' well-being and ensures that MDE's decision-making processes are transparent and inclusive.

WHAT POLLUTERS WILL THE CHERISH ACT APPLY TO?

The CHERISH Act defines at-risk communities across Maryland that are disproportionately burdened with pollution, based on scientific metrics.

For example, working-class communities in South Baltimore are exposed to pollution from the BRESKO Trash Incinerator, CSX Terminal, Patapsco Wastewater Treatment, a variety of concrete and asphalt plants, Curtis Bay Energy Medical Waste Incinerator, petroleum terminals, landfills, and other polluting facilities located in close proximity to each other. The census tracts from Westport to Curtis Bay have some of the highest EJ scores in the state, often in the 99th percentile.

It also identifies types of permits that contribute to pollution harming public health, based on communities' priorities. The CHERISH Act applies to applications for these permits in these communities.

HOW WILL COMMUNITIES PARTICIPATE IN THE CHERISH ACT?

Currently, MDE is required to take public comments and hold public hearings on request for many types of permits – but many of the permits with the biggest impacts on environmental justice communities are left out, like air permits for currently-operating facilities and some types of waste disposal permits. This means that communities usually don't get the opportunity to make their voices heard.

The CHERISH Act requires a public comment process on these permits for the first time, improving our democracy and the community's chances to shape permit outcomes.

WHAT WILL POLLUTERS NEED TO DO DIFFERENTLY UNDER THE CHERISH ACT?

When a company is applying to build a new polluting facility, expand an existing facility, or renew a permit for an existing facility within the geographic area the CHERISH Act covers for one of the specified types of permits:

- The permit applicant will include information about the existing pollution, environmental, and health conditions with their permit application, and what kind of pollution their facility contributes or would contribute.
- MDE will take public comments on this information and hold public hearings.
- Based on this information, MDE will decide whether issuing the permit would contribute to increasing the pollution burden on the community, or continuing the existing disproportionate pollution burden on the community.



If it would, MDE will **deny** new or expansion permit applications, and **deny or require additional protections** on renewal permits for facilities that already exist.

This will mean no more pollution gets added to disproportionately polluted communities, and the existing level of pollution can be decreased.

HOW DOES THE CHERISH ACT ADVANCE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE?

Everyone in Maryland deserves access to clean air and water, and healthy outdoor spaces. The CHERISH Act is in direct alignment with environmental justice goals set forth in [Maryland's Climate Pollution Reduction plan](#) and in MDE's [Climate Implementation Plan](#).

For more than a decade, Maryland's legislature has considered bills like the CHERISH Act, but has failed to pass any of them. Now, Maryland is falling behind states like [New Jersey](#), [New York](#), and [Minnesota](#) who have already passed similar legislation. It is time for Maryland to join these states and become a leader in delivering environmental justice to its residents.

Please join us to pass the CHERISH Our Communities Act!

