



*Forming Faithful Stewards,
Caring for Sacred Waters*

PO Box 6791
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March 5, 2024

Chairman Brian Feldman and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senate Bill 96 – Impact of Environmental Permits and State Agency Actions

Position: **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT**

Dear Chairman Feldman and Committee Members:

On behalf of Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake (IPC), I write to urge your **support** for the Impact of Environmental Permits and State Agency Actions bill (Senate Bill 96).

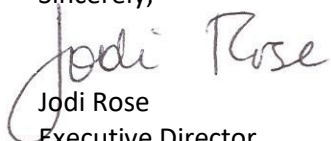
All people need clean air, clean water, and unpolluted soil to thrive and grow as part of society. Living next to pollution can affect your health, your ability to think, and reduce your life expectancy. According to the nonprofit CASA, many of the most polluted zip codes are also where immigrants, people of color, and low-income people call home. These sensitive populations are disproportionately exposed to high levels of pollution, along with the health harms and other negative consequences of that pollution. The Maryland Department of Environment (MDE) states on its website that its purpose is to “protect and preserve the state's air, water and land resources and safeguard the environmental health of Maryland's citizens.” **But, is it doing that? As people of faith, we are called to speak out against injustices that are perpetuating human health risks for our brothers and sisters in poor communities.**

Sacrifice zones are where oppressed communities disproportionately bear the burden of unwanted waste and pollution. The MDE presently does not have the authority to reject a permit in a sacrifice zone based solely on the risk of increased pollution on already-overburdened environmental justice communities. **Senate Bill 96 would change that** by requiring the MDE to screen certain pollution permit proposals when they are located in communities with a high Environmental Justice Score. The legislation then authorizes the agency to use the information MDE collects during an EJ analysis to make a decision about granting the permit, including denying or imposing conditions on proposed permits.

We are disappointed that the proposed Senate Bill 96 does not have more sweeping reach. The scope of permits covered under this bill is limited relative to the scope of health concerns in communities impacted by polluting incinerators, landfills, sewage sludge holding facilities and toxic chemical manufacturing operations. Senate Bill 96 would make a more meaningful impact if the important process enabled in the bill were also applied to air pollution permits, referred to as Title V permits. Despite these limitations, Senate Bill 96 creates important new procedures for balancing public health and economic production through the large facility permitting process, and it would be our hope that this legislation opens the door to increased protections for ALL of Maryland's citizens in the near future. **In the interest of achieving a new balance that better addresses long-standing community harms and concerns, IPC urges your FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT vote on the bill, to include Title V permits in the scope of the bill.**

As chairman of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee, you have the ability to bring the Impact of Environmental Permits and State Agency Actions before the legislature this year. We ask you to move forward on SB 96 to begin building a permitting process that protects all people from oppressive pollution. Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake and our partners stand ready to work with you on all matters of environmental justice for all Marylanders.

Sincerely,



Jodi Rose

Executive Director

Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake

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