



**Delaware-Maryland Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

Testimony Prepared for the  
Judicial Proceedings Committee  
on  
**Senate Bill 162**  
January 23, 2026  
Position: Favorable

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am Reverend Melody Hession, assistant to the bishop for public policy in the Delaware-Maryland Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a faith community with congregations in every part of the state.

As historical supporters of the Maryland Second Look Act, we join with those voices again to advocate for SB 162, which is a simple bill ensuring fundamental fairness and compliance with the U.S. Constitution in sentencing review.

Last session, the Maryland Second Look Act expanded the judicial review mechanism to include certain individuals who were ages 18 to 24 at the time of their offense. This has created an unconstitutional inconsistency, where individuals ages 18 to 24 receive an opportunity for review while individuals under 18 do not. For example, if a 15-year-old child and 24-year-old individual were arrested today as co-defendants, the 24-year-old would receive sentence review after 20 years while the 15-year-old youth would not. After a decade and a half of U.S. Supreme Court jurisprudence emphasizing how children are different than adults for the purposes of criminal sentencing, it is contrary to Constitutional protections that individuals 18 and over receive sentencing review while children under 18 do not.

In Maryland we have had an authorized congregation of incarcerated people, women and men, at Jessup since 1985, the Community of St. Dymas. The experience of our prison ministries is that there are prisoners who can be safely released into the community, and whose continued confinement would no longer serve any real purpose of justice.

We ask for a favorable report.

Rev. Melody Hession