



Delaware-Maryland Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Testimony Prepared for the
Judiciary Committee
on
House Bill 750
March 3, 2021
Position: **Favorable**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify about human rights and justice. I am Lee Hudson, assistant to the bishop for public policy in the Delaware-Maryland Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We are a faith community with congregations in three synods in every part of the State.

Ours is a global communion that has dealt with human movement since 1939 under the banner of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, located at 700 Light Street in Baltimore, an international service organization assisting and sponsoring those without a permanent home, wherever they are, wherever they may come to reside.

Human displacement is not criminal behavior. Most often it is flight, forced exile, or response to natural or social disaster. It falls, or should, within administrative state functions.

Our faith tradition has taken up the causes of human movement with an understanding of human worth and nascent rights. Displaced persons in the United States do have rights under U.S. law and it is our testimony that they should be advised of and understand the rights they have. We therefore support **House Bill 750** which would secure a right to counsel under an administrative function of the Maryland Attorney General.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has articulated as universal this instance of sacred, human dignity: *Humans are (created as) civic (i.e., communal) beings and have the right to equal access and participation in legal, civic and political decisions affecting them* ("Human Rights," ELCA social message, 2017, pg. 6). This is not less true for refugees, exiles, or displaced persons than for authorized citizens. In a social message on "Immigration" (ELCA, 1998, updated 2018) our understanding of and commitment to human rights for those without documents includes *reasonable access* (pg. 8) to lawful residence and citizenship. Because people without documents require legal apparatus to acquire a legal status, a right to counsel is an essential human right. We note also that there are always children among people without documents, and that children cannot possibly navigate a legal process absent counsel.

Our understanding of human rights, including the rights of those who come to be stateless, urges us to support House Bill 750, and we ask your favorable report. Thank you for this hearing.

Lee Hudson