



Testimony Prepared for the  
**Environment and Transportation Committee**  
on  
**House Bill 596**  
February 23, 2022  
Position: **Favorable**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify for a human right that inheres with the gifts of creation. 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 three synods in every part of our State.

Our community addressed concern for a safe, healthy environment that can sustain life in "Caring for Creation" [ELCA, 1993 assembly]. Among perspectives articulated in that statement are: While stewardship of natural resources and processes is a matter for the human ethos, it is a spiritual matter; because all living things are within the vital web called nature. Nature is simply not ours. It is a universal given, not traded goods.

Human activity has consequences. Consequence can end at illness and injury, life or death. We must discern in order to be wise; we must respect in order to flourish. Because communities of faith worship a Maker, they approach providence with reverence and awe. Through created gifts—provided, not earned or owned—the holiness of life, time and human experience are glimpsed. We are not merely all in this together; we are all of this together.

The policy proposal represented by **House Bill 596** has become influential in environmental advocacy: namely, an enumerated human right to a safe environment in constitutional law. We support it. Legal standing in defense of a right to the blessings of this life is good public and moral policy. It can assist protecting the natural context from exploitation and injury. And it may provide a platform to address an obvious social inequity.

Members of this Committee and General Assembly will know why. Environmental threats to health and safety are public concerns. Toxins, hazards, pollution of air, water, and soil are regular topics in most General Assembly sessions. A concern we have articulated in prior sessions is the disparity of health effects visited on some. We all breathe the same air, but it is not the same quality of air for everyone. Water may be supplied by a public authority, but not everybody's is safe. Pollutants and toxins are emitted, stored, dumped somewhere, but not in everyone's context. Current regulatory regimes that distribute hazards are often unfair. Once damage is done it's likely to get worse on the grounds the damage is already done.

*An environmental bill of rights would be an instrument to address this injustice of current public policy.* Denying that there is such a right implies a contrary: that there exists a prevailing right to despoil, sicken, and afflict. We trust that is not the sense of this General Assembly.

We note you will hear from a chorus of religious voices on this bill. What is important is that the voices are not only from an ecumenical, but also from an interfaith perspective; and not just within current religious organizations, but from spiritual insight gleaned across millennia. Our voice is in the chorus.

Advance a human right to a livable environment. Let the people of Maryland decide what environment they want to live in. Give **House Bill 596** a favorable report.

Lee Hudson