



# THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MARYLAND

## TESTIMONY CONCERNING HB 1371:

### Public Safety - States of Emergency and Catastrophic Health Emergencies - Treatment of Religious Organizations

**\*\*UNFAVORABLE\*\***

March 1, 2022

**TO:** Hon. Shane E. Pendergrass, Chair, Hon. Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair  
and the members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee

**FROM:** Rev. Kenneth O. Phelps, Jr., Co-Chair, Maryland Episcopal Public Policy  
Network, Diocese of Maryland

**DATE:** March 4, 2022

Rather than unifying the country, the current pandemic has only served to further politicize and divide the tribes that align themselves on the left and the right. Our issue with this bill is that we believe it is driven by politics and not by theology or altruism or any other construct of social conscience.

As another of our colleagues has argued, the act of worship does not constitute an essential service – in an emergency situation, it does not provide food, water, shelter or security. And spiritual support - the presence of God, the bond of love – is not limited to a specific place or a specific hour and day of the week.

Statistics from this pandemic have shown, however, that church services rank among the most notorious of super-spreader events. And, we view this bill as an attempt to codify irresponsible behavior by certain sects within the broader body of believers of all faiths.

The Diocese of Maryland requests an unfavorable report.