



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

Testimony Prepared for the
Judicial Proceedings Committee
and
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
on
Senate Bill 783
March 9, 2022
Position: **Favorable**

Mr. Chairmen and members of these Committees, 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: stewardship of natural resources and processes, while a matter of the human ethos, is also a spiritual matter; because all living things are within the vital web called nature. Nature is simply not ours. It is a universal given; it is providential.

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 hold providence in 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 proposal represented by **Senate Bill 783** has become influential environmental advocacy: namely, a specified human right to a safe environment stated as constitutional law. We support it. Legal standing in defense of a right to the blessings of this life is a public and a moral good. It can assist protecting the natural context from exploitation and degradation. And it may provide a platform to address an obvious social inequity.

Members of the Committees, and the General Assembly, will know why. Environmental threats to health and safety are public concerns. Toxins, hazards, pollution of air, water, and soil are regular subjects for 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 everyone'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 from current religious organizations, but from spiritual understandings 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. Please give **Senate Bill 783** a favorable report.

Lee Hudson