



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

Testimony Prepared for the
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
on
Senate Bill 620
February 28, 2024
Position: **Favorable**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to support restorative justice for adjudicated individuals in Maryland. 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 every jurisdiction of our State.

Our community has committed itself publicly to work and advocate for better outcomes for the incarcerated, and their communities. We have said, *(t)o dramatically increase chances for success, re-entry support must begin long before release from prison. By identifying needs such as basic life-skill and job-skill training, education and treatment needs at sentencing, and then comprehensively addressing these needs during incarceration, the likelihood of successful transition back into the community is heightened.* ("The Church and Criminal Justice", ELCA, 2013, pg. 45.)

By the way, the next sentence of this commitment reads, *The religious dimension of life is significant and deserves to be a major component of rehabilitative programs for those interested.* This we have done in Maryland since 1985 in the Community of St. Dymas, an authorized worshipping community of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America at the men's and women's facilities at Jessup. It is served by an ordained ELCA pastor. One of the aspirations of the ministry is successful reentry into community, family, and society for the incarcerated when they are released.

We hold what we believe can be a State interest in restorative justice, reducing recidivism and reclaiming human life for productive, thriving social engagement.

The pilot program under *Chapter 677 of 2021* was deemed successful. **Senate Bill 620** will expand that initiative to include education in a way that may fashion years lost to incarceration into time well-spent for amendment and progress in a human life. Because the State, its communities and the prisoner can all benefit, we ask your favorable report.

Lee Hudson