



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

Testimony Prepared for the
Ways and Means Committee
on
House Bill 696
February 14, 2024
Position: **Favorable**

Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify about nutrition and the well-being of the children of our State. 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 membership in every region of the State.

Our community's work in policy advocacy began as a commitment to end hunger. It remains one of the principal goals of our advocacy work, nationally and internationally. It was advanced in 1999 with, "Economic Life," (ELCA, re: *the moral imperative to seek sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all*). We maintain a permanent institutional appeal fund to address and advocate an end to hunger.

Child hunger is something like a permanent public scandal in the United States. One of the social defects illuminated during the Covid19 pandemic was a spike in malnourishment among children because of the loss of nutritional resources delivered by the public education system.

According to Save the Children, twelve million American children are hungry: Kentucky, **Maryland**, Oklahoma, and Washington, D.C. report a 22% rate of family hunger: in **Maryland**, Hispanic and Black families are almost 4 times as likely to face hunger as white families. For all the good work Maryland has done to address poverty, via health care expansions, work-fare, EITC, *etc.* these statistics shout that something is being left out.

It's Maryland's children. We must not leave out Maryland's children. There are social, public health, education, and economic consequences to child hunger. Leave those aside in your consideration of **House Bill 696**. It is cruelty to calculate malnourished children via profit incentives. *Hungry children have no agency over their condition.*

Maryland children, and almost certainly the hungry ones, are mandated by law to be public school children. Give them two acceptable meals a day. Just feed them. Diminish these appalling child hunger statistics, at least some, at least in Maryland. Pass **House Bill 696**.

Thank you for this important hearing.

Lee Hudson