



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

Testimony prepared for the
Economic Matters
and the
Environment and Transportation Committees
on
House Bill 128
January 23, 2025
Position: **Favorable**

Misters Chairmen and members of the Committees, thank you for the opportunity to testify about justice out of the grace of created goodness. 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 of three ELCA synods, located in every part of the State.

Our community named greenhouse gas emissions as pollutants of the natural world in 1993 (*Caring for Creation*, ELCA). Despite public discourse since, time has validated that assertion. It no longer matters what is thought and said about climate. Earth's atmosphere is dictating the vocabulary. The accurate word is no longer "change" or "crisis," it is *catastrophe*.

If what we value is articulated by what we spend, it's getting expensive to live in our built contexts. Private enterprises *and* public institutions are calculating costs of inundation and conflagration in their prospective finances.

The cost of carbon has been successfully shifted onto what is labeled "the public," risk socialized, that profit be hegemonized by proprietary interest. Justice in the created goodness of earth would allocate cost at its source to balance that equation.

House Bill 128 weighs the equation with a measure of historical volume from the largest carbon emitters. A fee on those volumes would finance a fund to help remediate environmental episodes recurring in most Maryland subdivisions.

Climate catastrophe cost has exceeded the cost of carbon-neutrality for some time. Thirty years further on our community reflected on its understanding of issues under the heading "climate" with a call for greater engagement via public discourse and action. Among the commitments we encourage is *allocation of resources to those who bear the least responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions but already experience disproportionately its costly impacts*. (*Earth's Climate Crisis*, ELCA 2023 Social Message)

Earth's atmosphere will make someone pay for these catastrophes one way or another. We ought to begin resourcing public relief now rather than later when more expensive damage will have been done. This policy is analogous to similar emergencies to the public health and safety from tobacco and toxic materials (see, e.g. the James and Cuyahoga Rivers, Love Canal, Exxon-Valdez, Deepwater, tobacco and asbestos settlements). Considering the new federal administration's stated intent to eliminate the practice by executive fiat, we note that "the polluter pays" is settled case law.

Seawalls and barriers, dredge-spoil islands, flood and fire insurances, infrastructure repair and hardening, disaster clean-up, treatment of health conditions for the affected are necessary, but insufficient if we keep burning stuff. GHG reduction needs to be incentivized in the economy. We ought to capture carbon profit to pay for what it is causing. Our community implores your favorable report.

Lee Hudson