



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HJ 0002

Criminal Law – Witchcraft - Exoneration

****FAVORABLE****

TO: Hon. Anne Healey, Chair, Hon. Marvin E. Holmes, Jr., Vice Chair and the members of the House Rules and Executive Nominations Committee

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

DATE: March 10, 2025

As George Orwell observed, ‘who controls the past controls the present; who controls the present controls the past.’

We – as people of faith – believe in the sacredness of story, be that of an individual, a community, a nation. To deny the telling of a story, an individual’s truth, is to devalue them and their standing in community, it dismisses their contribution to the common weal, and it sends the clear message that you are not important and that you do not belong – that you have no share in what is or what is to come. Or, in the case of those accused of witchcraft, places a permanent stigma upon the individuals singled out by the superstitions and prejudices of their communities. We applaud the efforts of this bill to tell a story that has been suppressed and whose participants have been ostracized, demonized, criminalized and in at least one case, terminated. But this bill is about more than the exoneration of these women or even about their actual innocence.

The downfall of every civilization has been precipitated by the very practice of scapegoating and demonizing a portion of its population. In the case of women, this has spanned the centuries, as male dominated societies have sought to maintain their power and influence by continued patterns of suppression and intimidation, denial of basic human rights, equal wages, and in many cases – as with these falsely accused practitioners of witchcraft – violence.



Ultimately, then, we support this resolution because it is about truth, a truth about our behaviors as a society that seek to diminish the other whom we fear or despise, be that another race, culture or in this case, another gender. And without this greater reckoning there can be no true reconciliation in our nation. There is a greater story that needs to be told. It is a shared history of which we may not be proud, but which defines us. And it is one we can embrace and finally move on together with a shared understanding of who we are as a people - a truth without which we can never be set free from the insidious grip of our past. And perhaps even ratify an Equal Rights Amendment.

History without truth is a fairytale at best, and propaganda at its worst, and serves no purpose other than to solidify the power that one group exercises over another.

The Diocese of Maryland requests a favorable report.