



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

Testimony Prepared for the
Judicial Proceedings Committee
on
Senate Bill 181
January 28, 2025
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 observed the complex of criminal justice in 2013 (*Hearing the Cries*, ELCA). In Maryland, we have engaged in a ministry to incarcerated individuals at Jessup since 1985, the Community of St. Dymas.

One finding of our experience of faith among the imprisoned is that...*the vast majority of individuals who have committed crimes do not require or deserve institutional confinement; reforms are urgently needed.* An obvious reform concern is the unnecessary confinement of the aged and the ill.

In some cases, incarceration to punish for the purpose of deterrence or to settle the score of an offense in public will have been accomplished by the advance of disease or diminishment. Surely the message of punishment may have evaporated at the close of life. Repeating it *ad infinitum* at State expense does not seem to advance any reasonable State interest.

In our experience there are prisoners that can be safely and securely released to receive treatment or compassion. Compassion of this sort would be, in our understanding, a better public messaging policy than repetitive retribution. That would have been the lesson we wished an offender had absorbed in the first place.

Senate Bill 181 would address this by providing a standard for compassionate release and we ask your favorable report.

Lee Hudson