



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

Testimony Prepared for the  
**Judiciary Committee**  
on  
**House Bill 853**  
February 18, 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, and in Maryland we have had an authorized congregation of incarcerated people, women and men, at Jessup since 1985, the Community of St. Dysmas.

We note in *Hearing the Cries* (ELCA, 2013) that...*the vast majority of individuals who have committed crimes do not require or deserve institutional confinement.* One way to reduce the population of the incarcerated and inject a moment of reason into discourse about carceral policy and practice is to reduce sentences. Recently we supported another obvious reform opportunity, consideration of release of the aged and very ill.

**House Bill 853** provides an additional option for reforming public carceral policy. Under a standard of having served at least twenty years of a sentence incarcerated individuals might be granted a right to a hearing to reduce their sentences.

At least two examples suggest themselves for such reconsiderations: 1} mandatory sentencing requirements that eliminated court discretion to consider a particular case's universe of circumstances; and 2} sentences levied according to now thoroughly discredited national and state criminal and penal projects. Either could be a swift remedy for chronic American ignominies of high incarceration rates (with accompanying egregious social disparities) and incessant prison overcrowding. There may be others...

The experience of our prison ministries is that there are prisoners who can be safely released into the community, and whose continued confinement would no longer serve any real purpose of justice. **House Bill 853** would facilitate reform by providing a standard for egregious sentencing mistakes and miscalculations.

We ask a favorable report.

Lee Hudson