



**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 751**  
**Victims of Communism Memorial Day**

**\*\*FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS\*\***

**TO:** Delegate Melissa Wells. Chair; Delegate Kenneth Kerr, Vice-Chair and the members of the House Government, labor and Elections Committee

**FROM:** The Rev. Ken Phelps, Jr., member of the Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network (MEPPN); The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland

**DATE:** March 17, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this written testimony on HB 0751 and to offer amendments and rationale for that request.

**Amendment 1:**

SECTION 5: AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED that the Governor annually shall proclaim September 10 as Victims of Capitalism Memorial Day. (September 10 is the date in 1897 that police opened fire on unarmed striking miners, killing nineteen and wounding 49).

A basic premise: Capitalism, like Communism, in its purest form, is not a form of government or a political policy per se. Both are economic theories. And both can – and have, historically – been abused by their subscribers, an abuse which continues to impact the lives of millions of people around the globe.

As Lord Acton wrote years ago: “Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority: still more when you superadd the tendency or the certainty of corruption by authority. There is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it.”

No system is perfect, but there are always those who will work it to their advantage at the expense of all others. Exploitation has run amok in our human history. And both economic systems have yielded to those temptations.

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The Episcopal Church has had a lot to say about economic justice.

Resolution 2012-A012 begins by reminding us that “all things in heaven and on earth belong to God alone, and that all worldly treasure is held in trust by human hands to the greater glory of God; and that all economic policy has moral dimensions and consequences for all human beings; and that global economies should be facilitated in consideration of the interconnectedness of all God's Creation.”

The Church also teaches that all economic life within communities, nations, and the global family should contribute to the well-being of all persons, serve the poor, and promote the dignity and rights of all human beings; and continually urges governments to evaluate and adopt policies that safeguard every human being's right to the basic necessities of life, as well as a right to work, to receive just and living wages and benefits, to experience decent and just working conditions, and to organize and join labor associations; and seeks improvements regarding food security, health care, maternal and child health, humane working conditions, human rights, and prevention of environmental degradations.

Throughout its recent history the Church has consistently supported efforts to provide a living wage, free education, universal health care, guaranteed housing and the right to a clean and healthy environment. And all of these efforts have been in response to an economic philosophy which has commodified every human right and need. Profits always come before people. And now millions of Americans have to choose between putting food on the table, paying their rent or getting health care.

The abuses of capitalism have a long history, much longer than that of communism and its derivatives. The prophets railed against the abuses by those who cheated their customers by rigging the scales or by charging interest or refusing to forgive debts in the year of Jubilee. Jesus' first act upon arriving in Jerusalem was to clear the Temple of the capitalists who were charging exorbitant exchange rates, overcharging for various essentials and applying interest to loans. In fact, Jesus offers over 230 teachings about the evils inherent in the pursuit of wealth and profit and power, and in one of his boldest statements calls upon his followers to sell all of their possessions and give the proceeds to the poor.

Our own history is marked by the suffering wrought of capitalism, from the enslavement of millions of Africans to the annihilation of indigenous peoples; the inhumane working conditions of the Industrial Age, and the violence against those who stood for the rights of laborers - on display in Lawrence, Massachusetts;

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Homestead, Pennsylvania, on the Anaconda Road, at the Lattimer Massacre and at Columbine Mine Massacre. The list is extensive.

No system is perfect, but the abuses of each need to be remembered as do the millions of victims of each, so that perhaps one day we will be able to resist the urge to accumulate wealth and power and create a society that honors and cares for every member of that society. Coming to terms with our past is always a good place to start.

### **Amendment 2:**

SECTION 6: AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED that the Governor annually shall proclaim May 31 as Victims of White Supremacy Memorial Day. (May 31 is the date that the Tulsa Massacre began, wherein up to 300 African Americans were slaughtered in a race driven frenzy).

From the enactment of The Maryland Slavery Act of 1664 - the colony's first legal codification of slavery that established that all imported Africans and their offspring would serve for life, a status known as *durante vita* and solidified racial slavery based on African descent, prohibited marriage between white women and enslaved Black men, and forced white women marrying slaves into lifelong servitude – to the implementation of Jim Crow laws, lynching, segregation, redlining, job discrimination and unequal funding for majority African American school districts, to our own segregated church demographics, we see that we have not fully reckoned with our past. We are not yet fully a community or a nation of love. We need to repent of that sin and make a public reckoning.

And, while the history of slavery is widely understood in the U.S., the continuing impact of its legacy is less understood. The symptoms and wounds of that old sin continue to poison our society and threaten the health of the Body of Christ of which we are all a part. After the hard-fought abolition of slavery, there was a fateful denial in our nation of reparations for freed African American people for their centuries of undeserved bondage, even though in many instances white plantation owners received reparations in the form of compensation for the losses they incurred from the Civil War and the end of slavery. Racism and greed fueled that basic injustice, and those attitudes have poisoned race relations ever since.

It is time for all of us to understand how power gained by force and wielded unevenly has impacted and continues to impact African Americans in this country. We can all celebrate the tremendous strides that have been made in racial attitudes in our nation, and we are very proud of the accomplishments of many individuals who have

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overcome great odds to achieve success. But for the millions of descendants of American slaves who are trapped in a pernicious cycle of hopelessness, poverty and rage due to their real experience of racial segregation, redlining, inferior schools and the like, the widespread assumption that everyone can pull themselves up by their own bootstraps is a long way from being accurate.

They know that the odds are against them on so many fronts: they cannot change their environment, and they cannot change the color of their dark skin. All of these factors have played into creating a lack of power for brown and black people. This lack is a social problem: it goes beyond an individual's character and will. It is time for all of us to move towards a place of acceptance of humans who want the same things we do, but who have not been found to be worthy of those desires by the dominant society.

And in the broadest sense, this bill – and we are suspect of its intent – skews the story of this nation. It implies that capitalism is the best – perhaps the perfect way – by which to order our society. In truth – as noted above – there is no perfect system and all of them are – and have been – easily compromised and corrupted. In a more narrow sense then, we see this bill as an attempt to continue the work of the current administration which seeks to erase those parts of our history that are most revealing, that make it most difficult to spin capitalism in the purest of lights – even slavery is deemed as part of doing business and was good for the slaves who suffered under that institution.

The point is that we need to tell the complete story of this nation - with all of its successes but also its many failures, so that as a people united, we can learn from our past and not fall prey to the same mistakes.

**We request a favorable report with amendments.**