



Delaware-Maryland Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Testimony Prepared for the
Judicial Proceedings Committee
on
Senate Bill 0791
February 23, 2026
Position: Favorable

Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am Reverend Melody Hession-Sigmon, assistant to the bishop for public policy in the Delaware-Maryland Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a faith community with congregations in every part of the state.

We are strong supporters of **Senate Bill 791**, and we think that it is the logical next step after the General Assembly and the Executive signed into law the emergency bill banning 287(g) agreements in the State of Maryland.

Our global communion has addressed human movement since 1939 when the entire planet was awash in refugees with our international organization, Global Refuge, at 700 Light Street in Baltimore. This organization assists and sponsors those without a permanent home, wherever they may be from, to wherever they may come to reside. We have learned much about human movement as a result of our global work. Most people categorized as refugees are fleeing for their lives from famine, natural disaster, war, social collapse, extreme poverty, or targeted persecution. They are neither threats because they are refugees, nor criminals because they are fleeing.

The experience of Global Refuge does not align with the response we are seeing coming out of the federal government, and we are inclined to look towards our church's social teaching published in 1998 on immigration in order to inform our response and our position on **Senate Bill 791**.

In 1998, our church prophetically urged that, "The existence of a permanent sub-group of people who live without recourse to effective legal protection opens the door for their massive abuse and exploitation and harms the common good. We urge leaders and citizens to seek feasible responses to this situation that offer flexible and humane ways for undocumented persons who have been in this country for a specified amount of time to be able to adjust their legal status." We



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are seeing that massive abuse and exploitation that is harming the common good coming from the federal agents being deployed in our communities today.

The policies coming out of the federal government are hostile and racist towards Maryland's migrant and refugee communities, offering simplistic solutions that do great harm to families and community trust towards their local law enforcement, who have pledged to serve and protect. We believe, like the founding fathers, that protections like due process are meant for *all people*, not just US Citizens.

“Our advocacy will continue to insist that family reunification should be the primary objective of immigration laws.” (1998) We oppose federal policies that show no regard for our valuable Maryland families and their integral connection to the support systems of our communities.

Principles published by the Lutheran Council of the United States in 1969 continue to guide our ministries working with migrants and refugees today, such as advocating for fair and just immigration laws, “by assuming the United States’ proper share of international responsibility for the resettlement of refugees and other persons urgently in need of the compassionate haven of a new home land.” We oppose county complicity in federal immigration policy that takes no international responsibility for compassionate welcome of refugees.

Our national church has called our congregations to welcome *all* people, regardless of immigration status. We believe that *all* of us in the Church of Jesus Christ are sojourners, “for here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (Hebrews 13: 14) We particularly abhor federal policies keeping children inside detention centers that have been accused by groups like Human Rights Watch of breaking international human rights violations due to poor living conditions. When it comes to children, “whatever their status, they should be seen first and foremost as children and youth in need of protection and care.” (1998)

Obtaining papers for lawful presence in the United States is first a federal authority, and therefore responsibility. The national processes for lawful presence in the U.S. are still arduous, lengthy, and legal, and none of it is in the purview of county policy. We urge a favorable report for **SB 791**.

Reverend Melody Hession-Sigmon