



Delaware-Maryland Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Testimony Prepared for the
Judiciary Committee
on
House Bill 0084
February 3, 2026
Position: Favorable

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am Reverend Melody Hession, 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.

Last session, three Lutheran residents at Maryland Correctional Institute for Women in Jessup submitted testimony in favor of the Maryland Second Look Act. These parishioners are members of our congregation which gathers inside the facility, called The Community of St. Dysmas. The testimonies were of two women and one trans man. All three of their testimonies included stories of their own sexual assault within the context of the crime, and for none of these Lutherans was their harm a meaningful part of the conversation during sentencing.

Our church acknowledged in 2013 that persistent inequalities based on race, ethnicity, gender, and class challenge our criminal justice system's commitment to basic principles of justice, imposing great costs on everyone involved in the system and on society as a whole.

LaTronda Jackson, a Lutheran woman who was a survivor of sexual assault in the context of the crime for which she was convicted, has served 36 years and she still has several years ahead of her, an overly harsh sentence because the system was only equipped to see her as a criminal, rather than as a complex web of both criminal and survivor. Her family suffers on the outside as her children are deprived of their mother, though she does all she can through limited circumstances to support her children through programs like Girl Scouts Beyond Bars. Stories like Ms. Jackson's are why we of the ELCA advocate for more trauma informed sentencing in Maryland.

We urge a favorable report.

Rev. Melody Hession