



Delaware-Maryland Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Testimony Prepared for the
Judiciary Committee
on
House Bill 0444
January 23, 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.

We have historically supported the prevention of Maryland subdivisions from subcontracting their services and facilities to ICE for the purpose of expanding immigration authority into local law enforcement. Last year, the Reverend Lee Hudson submitted testimony in favor of HB1222 on behalf of our bishop's office to this effect, and this year I submit this testimony to reiterate that support.

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 not threats because they are refugees. They are not criminals because they are fleeing. Crimes committed by any individual in the United States can be policed and adjudicated with current law.

There has been testimony in the Maryland General Assembly for decades about why these contracts between federal and local law enforcement compromise the ability of local law enforcement agencies to police their communities effectively. Our understanding of refugee communities concurs with that observation.



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Obtaining papers for lawful presence in the United States is first a national, that is federal authority, and therefore responsibility. It is the responsibility of the United States Congress to legislate. The processes for lawful presence in the U.S. are arduous, lengthy, and legal, and none of it is in the purview of Maryland law. Now, the escalation of the violence of ICE in Maryland counties has made this an urgent matter.

For all these reasons, and for the more direct justice of human rights, we support your favorable report for this bill.

Reverend Melody Hession