

# Maryland Ecumenical Office for Public Policy

Delaware-Maryland Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
Episcopal Diocese of Maryland  
Metropolitan Washington DC Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
United Church of Christ, Central Atlantic Conference

Testimony Prepared for the  
House Judiciary Committee

on

House Bill 1075 Death Penalty Repeal

March 15, 2011

Position: Support

The Maryland Ecumenical Office for Public Policy (MEOPP) speaks with a common voice for the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland, the Delaware-Maryland Synod (ELCA), the Metropolitan Washington DC Synod (ELCA), and the United Church of Christ, Central Atlantic Conference. It includes 387 congregations in Maryland.

The Maryland Ecumenical Office for Public Policy supports House Bill 1075, Death Penalty Repeal. All the denominations that form MEOPP agree that the death penalty undermines respect for human life.

The Death Penalty harms society. “The practice of the death penalty undermines any possible moral message we might want to ‘send.’ It is not fair and fails to make society better or safer.”<sup>1</sup> The Death Penalty is costly. The Death Penalty is not a deterrent, and the Death Penalty is unjust.

The Death Penalty is costly in terms of dollars and emotions. Death Penalty cases cost society more than life in prison without the possibility of parole. The Urban Institute’s 2008 study concluded that because of appeals, it cost as much as \$1.9 million more for a state attorney to put someone on death row than it did to put a person in prison. A case that resulted in a death sentence cost \$3 million, compared with less than \$1.1 million for a case in which the death penalty was not sought.<sup>2</sup> Death Penalty cases also extract an emotional cost. The Maryland Commission on Capital Punishment found that effects of capital cases are more detrimental to families than are life without the possibility of parole cases.<sup>3</sup>

The Death Penalty is not a deterrent. The 2008 Maryland Commission on Capital Punishment found no evidence that the Death Penalty influences a person’s decision to commit murder<sup>4</sup>.

The Death Penalty is not just. The Death Penalty is applied disparately in terms of race and jurisdiction. Further, innocent people are found guilty. The Maryland Commission on Capital Punishment found that “the administration of the death penalty clearly shows racial bias and that no procedural or administrative changes to the processing of capital cases would eliminate these racial disparities.”<sup>5</sup> Further it found great jurisdictional disparities.<sup>6</sup>

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Whether the death penalty is sought depends on the race of the victim and the accused, and where the crime took place. At best it is not evenly applied, at worse innocent lives are taken. The Commission found that the risk of execution of an innocent person, like Kirk Bloodsworth, is a real possibility.<sup>7</sup> Unlike life in prison without the possibility of parole, the execution of an innocent person is a mistake we cannot correct.

The Death Penalty does not serve society. It is economically and emotionally costly. It does not keep society safer, and it is applied unfairly and sometimes wrongly. The Death Penalty only serves society as a means of revenge. Revenge leaves no place for forgiveness. “[A] criminal justice system based on revenge is a system marred with a consciousness of violence...civil society must establish a criminal justice system that respects the dignity of humankind.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Social Statement on the Death Penalty (1991), 4.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411625\\_md\\_death\\_penalty.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411625_md_death_penalty.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Maryland Commission on Capital Punishment, Report to the General Assembly (December 12, 2008), 55.

<sup>4</sup> Id. at 22

<sup>5</sup> Id. at 11.

<sup>6</sup> Id. at 36.

<sup>7</sup> Id. at 61.

<sup>8</sup> Bishop Eugene Sutton ([www.ang-md.org/sutton/death-penalty.php](http://www.ang-md.org/sutton/death-penalty.php))