

Religious Leaders Urge Lawmakers to Repeal State's Death Penalty

By Maria Wiering

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ANNAPOLIS – Religious leaders joined other death penalty opponents March 7 to speak before a General Assembly committee in support of Senate Bill 872, which would repeal the death penalty in Maryland.

Among them was Father Ty Hullinger, Baltimore pastor of St Dominic and the Catholic Community of St. Anthony of Padua and Most Precious Blood, testifying on behalf of Bishop Denis J. Madden, who was unable to attend in person. Bishop Madden, a longtime outspoken opponent to capital punishment, also submitted a written testimony to the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, which held the hearing.

“The Catholic Church’s longstanding advocacy for death penalty repeal in Maryland reflects our consistent advocacy for laws that respect all human life – even that of the convicted criminal,” Father Hullinger told the committee members.

“Through my work as an inner-city pastor, I feel keenly the harm that a culture of violence has wrought on our community, and recognize daily the dire need for a change in culture that can only be brought about through a genuine respect for all human life,” he said. “We urge you, as women and men charged with the duty of enshrining in our laws the principles of justice and the common good, to listen truthfully to the voice of your moral conscience, informed by the light of reason, and by the foundational beliefs that each of our faith communities contributes to the public square.”

Father Hullinger joined four members of the Ecumenical Leaders Group, which brings together interdenominational church leadership for dialogue and common purpose. They included Bishop Eugene Taylor Sutton of the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland; Bishop John Roland Schol of the Washington Area of The United Methodist Church; the Rev. Dr. John Deckenback, Conference Minister for the Central Atlantic Conference of the United Church of Christ; and the Rev. Alvin Gwynn, president of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance and pastor of Baltimore’s Friendship Baptist Church.

Prior to the panel that included Father Hullinger’s three-minute testimony, family members of murder victims and a man wrongfully accused of murder testified in support of the law.