



**BILL NO:** House Bill 656  
**TITLE:** Family Law - Victims of Domestic Violence Program - Certification and Grant Fund  
**COMMITTEE:** Judiciary  
**HEARING DATE:** February 15, 2024  
**POSITION:** **FAVORABLE**

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The Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV) is the state domestic violence coalition that brings together victim service providers, allied professionals, and concerned individuals for the common purpose of reducing intimate partner and family violence and its harmful effects on our citizens. **MNADV urges the House Judiciary Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 656.**

In the FY24 budget, only \$2,058,824 of state dollars were allocated for the Maryland Domestic Violence Program (DOMV). House Bill 656 would establish the Victims of Domestic Violence Program Grant Fund and states that the Governor *may* include an annual appropriation of \$5 million.

The 19 comprehensive domestic violence programs eligible for this fund provide emergency shelter, 24-hour hotlines, counseling services, safety planning, and are there any time of day or night when a victim is in need.<sup>1</sup> Programs must be sufficiently funded so that no victim has an unmet need, especially one that could be a matter of life or death. An increase in general fund allocations for domestic violence would enable programs to retain qualified staff, to hire additional staff to better meet victims' needs, and to develop new programs. Service providers are reticent to engage in hiring or expansion due to funding needs, yet the needs of victims are greater than ever.

A greater financial commitment to domestic violence programs and services will benefit not only victims of domestic violence but Maryland as a whole. The impact of even a single incident of domestic violence reverberates throughout the state and can have a significant financial impact on the State of Maryland, while the direct impact on the victim and their family is unquantifiable.

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<sup>1</sup> Md. Ann. Code, Family Law §4-515,  
<https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/Laws/StatuteText?article=gfl&section=4-515&enactments=false>



There were more than 20,000 domestic violence incidents reported as crimes in FY21 in Maryland.<sup>2</sup> The actual number of domestic violence incidents is much higher since at least half of all domestic violence occurrences are unreported.

Research has been conducted by other states and counties to determine the financial impact of domestic violence and the numbers are astounding. In Milwaukee County it is estimated that the annual economic loss as the result of domestic violence is \$113.1 million.<sup>3</sup> The State of Wisconsin estimates their annual economic loss to be over \$657.8 million.<sup>4</sup> In South Carolina, in 2020, the economic impact of domestic violence was \$358.4 million.<sup>5</sup> The lifetime cost of domestic violence is estimated to be \$103,767 for a female victim and \$23,414 for a male victim.<sup>6</sup> The consequences of domestic violence are widespread and effect children exposed to the violence, worker productivity, the healthcare system, the civil legal system, the criminal legal system, and law enforcement.

It is consistently reported statewide that the complexity and severity of domestic violence has increased. One program director expressed that “the hundreds of people on our waitlist who want to know if there is someone there for them keeps me up at night. Everyone deserves to be safe.” Another program reported that they experienced a 92% increase in domestic violence calls for service in FY22 with a 74% increase in time spent per call. Yet a third program documented a 111% increase in hotline calls since FY20. These numbers are just a small sample that demonstrates the vast increase requiring more funding to meet the needs of victims of domestic violence in Maryland.

A modest investment of \$5 million dollars to serve and benefit victims of domestic violence could potentially save the state millions of dollars by preventing further incidents of domestic violence

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<sup>2</sup> [https://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/Exec/GOCPYVS/FL4-516\(a\)\\_2021.pdf](https://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/Exec/GOCPYVS/FL4-516(a)_2021.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d39f654dfc553000198b222/t/6345b7f7fc2276703a2bf19d/1665513464758/Economic+Impact+of+DV+FINAL.+10.11.2022.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.jkffc.org/files/8bfe809e-c9fe-4504-b20f-593f24e17b0d--c5cb8b8c-e286-43b0-bd11-0e52a1dcd552/sc-dv-study.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6161830/>



and save the lives of victims in need. With rising inflation, an unprecedented numbers of mental health needs, the burdens on those serving victims of domestic violence continues to mount.

The certification of programs as comprehensive programs by MNADV, the federally recognized state domestic violence coalition, would help determine which programs are eligible for the designated funding. MNADV provides trainings and technical assistance to comprehensive programs and works collaboratively to ensure victims have access to life saving services.

For the above stated reasons, the **Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence urges a favorable report on HB 656.**