

BILL NO: House Bill 861/Senate Bill 788
TITLE: Criminal Procedure – Victim Compensation – Alterations
COMMITTEE: Judiciary/Judicial Proceedings
HEARING DATE: March 9, 2023
POSITION: SUPPORT

Good afternoon, Chairperson, Vice Chairperson and Members of the Committee. My name is Lisa Sloyer, and I am an Advocacy and Resource Program Manager at TurnAround, Inc., a Baltimore-based organization that has been working with victims of intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking for more than 40 years. We see firsthand the emotional, physical, and financial trauma that survivors of these crimes experience. We urge the committee to issue a favorable report on SB788.

The current system for compensating victims is not working. Too often, the survivors we work with are left without the financial resources they need to move forward after enduring horrific trauma. For survivors of intimate partner violence, for example, quick financial support is critical to establishing independence and not returning to an abusive partner.

Senate Bill 788 ensures that victims are compensated fairly and quickly. Importantly, the proposed legislation also reflects the reality of how trauma can affect a victim's behavior. Victims often choose not to report their victimization to law enforcement, so the proposed legislation no longer requires a police report to prove a crime happened. Victims often need time to heal from their trauma before telling their story and the proposed legislation allows victims to apply for compensation at any time.

These changes in the law would have made a huge difference to one of my clients. As a survivor of intimate partner violence, she needed compensation funds after leaving her abuser. Filling out the application was painful, requiring her to recount what had happened to her in detail. Six months passed before she received a response, and even then, there was no compensation, just a retraumatizing demand for additional proof of her abuse.

Happily, my client found work and became financially stable. But for others, this kind of delayed response can be dangerous. Victims deserve a compassionate compensation process and swift financial help so they can build safe lives for themselves and their families.

For these reasons I urge a favorable report on SB788. Thank you.