



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB788
Criminal Procedure – Victim Compensation - Alterations

March 9, 2023

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.
2 East
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Testimony of Marian House in Support of SB788

**Dear Chair Smith, Vice-Chair Waldstreicher,
and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,**

Marian House is a holistic, healing community for women and their children who are in need of housing and support services. Marian House provides comprehensive support services to assist women with experiences of trauma, including poverty, substance abuse, and incarceration. **I write to urge you to support SB788.**

Over forty years ago, Marian House was opened to provide reentry supports for women leaving incarceration as Sisters and laywomen recognized that lack of support contributed to recidivism rates. Today, we have also expanded to serve women with histories of trauma including homelessness, incarceration, neglect, substance abuse and mental health needs. Since our opening, we have assisted women who have been victims of crime in reinventing and rebuilding themselves through services such as: counseling, substance abuse treatment, job training and providing both long and short-term housing. All the women we have served have overcome obstacles on their journeys to become contributing members of society in the Baltimore area.

Victim Compensation is about public safety. By assisting with the destabilizing expenses that come with the trauma of violent victimization, such as medical care, mental health care, lost wages, funeral and burial expenses, crime scene cleanup and more, compensation helps reduce the risk of future victimization and perpetration of harm, and the long-term costs of violence to the state. The current victim compensation process disproportionately disqualifies and alienates applicants of color and their families from receiving compensation at alarming rates, especially Black men and youth impacted by gun and other forms of community violence. Maryland has one of the lowest grant rates of victim compensation in the country. Over half of all claims were denied victim compensation in Maryland as ineligible or closed without any compensation in FY22 with no victim of domestic violence related crimes awarded compensation.

HB 861/SB 788 removes numerous requirements that bar victims from eligibility for victim compensation, including the requirements that a victim must report a crime to law enforcement within 48 hours and that a victim must “cooperate” with law enforcement. It also helps clarify and expand which relatives are eligible to receive compensation and what types of expenses are eligible for reimbursement



MARIAN HOUSE

Women Moving from Dependence to Independence

to more accurately reflect family structures and the needs of victims. The bill also strikes the concept of the “perfect victim” who may have “contributed” to their own victimization. A large body of evidence and lived experience demonstrates this has not been effective at helping people heal and preventing future victimization; rather, it has too often exacerbated the trauma victims experience in the aftermath of violent crime. This bill reconstitutes the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board to include more members with lived experience and those that work directly with victims. The claims process is streamlined in HB 861/SB 788 to reduce the unacceptable delays victims currently experience if they engage in the victim compensation process. Enhanced program reporting requirements are included to improve transparency and accountability. Finally, HB 861/SB 788 removes the counterproductive reliance on criminal justice fines and fees to fund these benefits, creating greater program stability. For these reasons, **we urge your SUPPORT of SB788.**

Thank you for your support,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie Allston". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Katie Allston, LCSW-C
President and C.E.O.