



Testimony in **Support** of
Criminal Procedure - Victim Compensation - Alterations

SB788/HB861

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Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence

March 9, 2023

Dear Chair Smith, Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, and distinguished members of the Committee,

Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence (MPGV) is a statewide, grassroots organization dedicated to reducing gun deaths and injuries throughout the state of Maryland. We urge the committee for a **FAVORABLE** report on House Bill 861 which seeks to create an accessible, non-discriminatory victim compensation process to support all victims of crime, or their family members left behind. It will provide prompt and crucial financial support when it is needed most, and remove unnecessary and arbitrary denials of financial relief for applicants for expenses incurred as a result of being a victim of crime.

Each year, more than 474 people in Maryland die by gun homicide and nearly 551 people are shot and wounded in firearm assaults. In the aftermath, survivors and families suffer from emotional trauma while managing new financial burdens related to immediate and long-term medical and mental health care, funeral expenses, or even the costs of cleaning a deceased relative's home. Survivors may lose wages while they take time off of work to recover, receive physical therapy, or appear in court. While victim compensation is technically available to survivors of gun crimes and the families of those killed by guns, too often victim compensation can be denied if they or their loved one had a prior criminal conviction, filled out an application incorrectly, failed to file within a certain time frame, or failed to report or cooperate with law enforcement.

In the aftermath of gun violence, survivors and families require physical, emotional, and financial support. Access to this support is complicated by debilitating trauma, limited resources, and in the case of victim compensation, administrative obstacles and restrictions. Survivors and victim advocates have been working for years to incorporate federal and state fixes to victim compensation statutes and administration. As federal fixes to victim compensation funding are under way, states must also take action to increase victims' awareness of compensation, ease the application process, and adequately fund the needs of gun violence survivors. The struggle to cope with short- and long-term effects of a shooting or threat with a gun should not be exacerbated by a fight to navigate and receive victim compensation.

Senate Bill 788 moves to address many of these administrative burdens and restructure the fund to create greater program stability. MPGV urges a favorable report on SB788.