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*Legislative District 11*  
Baltimore County

Judicial Proceedings Committee

Joint Committee on Children, Youth,  
and Families

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake  
and Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area



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## *The Senate of Maryland*

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

### **TESTIMONY OF SENATOR SHELLY HETTLEMAN** **SB 788 CRIMINAL PROCEDURE – VICTIM COMPENSATION - ALTERATIONS**

When someone is a victim of a crime, often those most affected are not prepared to deal with the aftermath. Survivors of crime find themselves paying medical bills for injuries, assuming responsibility for the funeral expenses of a murdered loved one, bearing the practical, financial, and emotional burdens at a time when they are least prepared to – following a traumatic disruption in their lives. Our State has a process that is supposed to address the needs of crime victims, but it is in need of reform, and SB 788 ensures that victims of crimes receive the help they so desperately need.

The Maryland Criminal Injuries Compensation Board (CICB), housed in the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth and Victim Services, is designed to provide aid and assistance to victims of crime in Maryland. The mission of the CICB is incredibly important, however, our current statute has structural impediments that make it impossible for the Board from doing more for victims.

While people from all different backgrounds are affected by criminal activity and violence, its effects are not equal. Existing bureaucratic processes and strict eligibility rules mean that many individuals who have been hurt by violent crime are unable to access victim services when they need them most. People of color, who experience violent incidents at more than twice the rate of others, face even more significant difficulties when trying to access help because our laws, policies, and practices act as barriers. These barriers make our society less safe by increasing already-existing mistrust and cynicism about our criminal justice system and by alienating those who could both benefit from the support of and assist law enforcement.

SB 788 puts victim recovery first by:

1. Making urgently needed changes to the makeup of the Board
  - The bill increases the number of positions on the Board from 5 members to 9 members.
  - The bill ensures the Board is racially, ethnically, geographically, and gender diverse.
  - The bill also guarantees that survivors of violence from heavily impacted communities have a seat at the table and provides victim advocates & community leaders a voice.
2. Creating a more streamlined and accessible process for victims to claim a need for assistance
  - The bill speeds up the process that the Board reviews claims, giving them 30 days to respond to a claim instead of 90 days.
  - The bill allows claimants to appeal Board decisions to the courts.
  - The bill widens the timeframe to make a claim from 3 years to 5 years

3. Increasing benefits for victims, recognizing the real costs of services
  - The bill increases the cap for funeral expenses from \$7,500 to \$10,000.
  - The bill increases the cap for mental health treatment expenses from \$10,000 to \$45,000.
  - The bill increases the cap for an emergency award from \$5,000 to \$10,000.
  - The bill includes medical supplies, relocation costs, childcare expenses, and transportation costs as reimbursable expenses.

Promoting recovery and respect for those who have been victimized by crime is just one aspect of this legislation – this is also about keeping our communities safe. Supporting victims who carry heavy burdens, such as medical treatment, counseling, missed wages, funeral expenses and more, can help decrease the possibility of future trauma and the financial strain criminal activity has on our State. SB 788 is an investment in public safety.

I urge a favorable report on SB 788, and I thank you for your consideration.