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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 788

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House of Ruth is a non-profit organization providing shelter, counseling, and legal services to victims of domestic violence throughout the State of Maryland. House of Ruth has offices in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Prince George's County, and Montgomery County. Senate Bill 788 would create a victim compensation process that is accessible to all victims of crime, or their family members left behind, provide prompt and crucial financial support when it is needed most, and remove unnecessary and arbitrary denials of financial relief for victims of crimes. **We urge the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee to favorably report on Senate Bill 788.**

The Criminal Injuries Compensation Board (CICB) is designed to provide aid and assistance to victims of crime in Maryland. Its stated statutory authority is to be construed to remedy the harm to the victim and in favor of eligibility for the victim or claimant. For those who are found to qualify, it can be an extremely helpful remedy as it helps pay for expenses incurred as a result of the injuries.

Unfortunately, in current practice it is extremely difficult for victims to qualify for and receive reimbursement from the CICB. The current law has an array of onerous and unrealistic requirements, including: the crime must be reported within 24 hours; the victim must fully cooperate with all law enforcement units; relief is limited to victims of violent crimes; it does not provide relief for domestic partners of victims; and, it does not compensate for psychological injuries.

SB 788 would alleviate many of the above-described barriers. In addition, SB 788 would increase the funds available to victims; include relocation costs as a form of relief; shorten the time the Board has to respond to a claim; extend the filing time for victims; and, increase the money to the Governor's budget for compensation. All of these measures would greatly help victims of crimes, including domestic violence victims.

The House of Ruth urges the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee to report favorably on SB 788.