



VICTIM SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD

March 9, 2023

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
Chair, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Support – SB 788 – Criminal Procedure – Victim Compensation – Alterations

Dear Chairman Smith:

Senate Bill 788 revises Maryland law to alter the composition of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board and the procedures by which the Board makes awards to crime victims. Specifically, Senate Bill 788 would expand the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, ensuring that the Board reflects the diversity of Maryland's population, and that crime victims will always have a voice on the Board. This bill would further include, within the range of expenses that would justify an award from the Board, additional expense categories such as relocation costs and the transportation and child care costs associated with seeking mental health services. Finally, Senate Bill 788 would more fulsomely fund the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, thereby expanding the amount of money available to crime victims.

The Montgomery County Victim Services Advisory Board (VSAB) advises the Montgomery County Council and the Montgomery County Executive on assisting the needs of victims of a broad range of violent crimes, including rape, domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking. The number and severity of sexual assault and domestic violence cases referred to Montgomery County HHS Trauma Services increased substantially during the COVID-19 pandemic. This finding is consistent with data showing violent crime has risen nationally over the last few years, leading to increased prosecutions.

As crime has risen nationally and in Maryland, there are, unfortunately, more crime victims in need of mental health and other services. This is especially true for victims of sexual assault and child abuse, who are among the most vulnerable members of our community. Senate Bill 788 will ensure that the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board is representative of the State's population, and that victims' advocates are always represented there. This bill will also ensure that victims have access to the financial assistance they need, whether to relocate, or to pay for the medical, mental health, or other expenses that may become necessary when they unfortunately become crime victims. Taken together, the provisions in Senate Bill 788 will improve how our community treats victims and addresses the trauma and after-effects of criminal activity.

Accordingly, VSAB asks the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 788.

Sincerely,

Brian D. Koosed
VSAB Co-chair

Department of Health and Human Services