



February 24, 2023

Dear House Judiciary Committee,

I am a Professor of Psychology at Towson University and an expert in the impact and treatment of trauma-related disorders such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. I am writing to explain why I strongly favor the support of HB801, Criminal Injuries Compensation Board - Eligible Individuals and Direct Reimbursement for Mental Health Services. I hope you vote in favor of this critically important bill.

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I have treated survivors of criminal injuries and seen the tremendous toll that the victims of crimes suffer, but the “victims” of such crimes are not just the individual suffering the crime, their biological child/children, and parents. That is the current definition of victim and it is too narrow. Victims and survivors include caregivers who may not be the biological parent. Victims include caregivers such as grandparents and other adults in the family, as well as siblings, intimate partners, and step children. The current narrow definition has resulted in many untreated victims who cannot afford to get treatment for PTSD and other psychological symptoms/disorders such as depression that developed as a result of the violent crime. Research shows clearly that untreated PTSD can last for 20 years or more, and cause tremendous emotional suffering, as well as impair the victim’s ability to work, parent, and have healthy relationships for years (Kessler, 2000). Individuals with untreated PTSD are more likely to develop depression, substance abuse problems, and to be at risk for suicide, among many other negative outcomes (Kessler, 2000). The symptoms of PTSD include feeling agitated, angry and suspicious of others. These individuals sometimes become offenders themselves due to their “jacked up” nervous systems. Treatment can resolve those symptoms and help keep these already-traumatized individuals and families from suffering even more losses. We need all Marylanders to be able to function and live full lives, including those that have been victims of crime.

It is important to realize that the current law discriminates against people who are not materially privileged. Criminal injuries compensation should not be tied to a person’s current economic status. The current law is a counseling reimbursement model. When a person is impacted by crime,

they have to deal with the crime, the recovery process, and possibly losing finances due to the injuries which may include the loss of a family member who was providing part of household finances. Can you imagine being the still-working grandmother whose grandchild was killed, and still being responsible for taking care of the deceased person's children while grieving and trying to work? People are also dealing with a crime investigation and they are traumatized by the crime. They may have to go through multiple interviews with police and attorneys, and testify in trial, all the while still grieving. The systems and procedures currently in place do not adequately support victims and survivors. Victims need compassion, equity in service, and advocacy support. Depression and PTSD take a tremendous toll on victims. It is a burden to require them to obtain and mail in receipts for psychotherapy, and wait the weeks or months until they are compensated. When I treat victims of violent crime, many days it is a success if they can simply get out of bed and shower. It is also incredibly difficult for them to get to therapy sessions. Please do not require them to also turn in receipts for treatment when they may barely be able to take care of their hygiene, homes, and children.

What's the solution? Make treatment services available in communities across Maryland where trauma informed and culturally competent mental health providers can be paid directly from the State. This will allow victims to go to community-based trauma mental health professionals without having to pay for treatment. We need Maryland to be trauma informed and responsive.

In summary, please vote in support of HB801, Criminal Injuries Compensation Board - Eligible Individuals and Direct Reimbursement for Mental Health Services.

Sincerely,
Bethany Brand
Bethany Brand, Ph.D.
Professor, Towson University

Kessler, R. C. (2000). Posttraumatic stress disorder: The burden to the individual and to society. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry, 61*(suppl 5), 4-14.



