



VICTIM SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD

February 28, 2023

The Honorable Luke Clippinger
Chair, House Judiciary Committee
Room 101, House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Support – HB 801 – Criminal Injuries Compensation Board – Eligible Individuals and Direct Reimbursement for Mental Health Services

Dear Chairman Clippinger:

House Bill 801 alters Maryland law to change which individuals are eligible to receive mental health counseling paid for by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund. Specifically, House Bill 801 would ensure that mental health services are provided – free of charge – to victims of crime in Maryland, and to a parent, child, stepchild, sibling, or intimate partner of a crime victim. This bill would further require the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board to directly reimburse mental health professionals who provide these mental health services.

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 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 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. House Bill 801 will ensure that when a victim or a victim's family member needs mental health services to address the trauma caused by a crime, they will get that assistance regardless of their socioeconomic status. This bill will also ensure that the many wonderful mental health workers throughout Maryland are compensated appropriately for their invaluable work in helping victims and their families to address trauma. Taken together, House Bill 801 will give our State the best possible chance of putting these vulnerable members of our community on the road to recovery.

Accordingly, VSAB asks the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 801.

Sincerely,

Brian D. Koosed
VSAB Co-chair

Department of Health and Human Services