

**Testimony on House Bill 861/ Senate Bill 788
In favor of HB861/ Senate Bill 788- Criminal Procedure - Victim Compensation -
Alterations**

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Testimony**

Community Justice works to end gun violence by empowering those closest to the pain to advance life saving solutions. In partnership with Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence coalition, we see gun violence as a public health crisis and are advocating for a public health approach that centers those directly impacted by this crisis and implements evidence informed strategies to intervene and prevent violence.

[In Maryland, 743 people die, and another 1,363 people are wounded by guns](#) annually (1). [A single homicide has been show to cost approximately \\$1 - \\$2 million](#). Gun violence is now the leading cause of [premature death for all youth](#) and Black men in America. Despite this fact, the current victim compensation process disproportionately disqualifies Black and Brown applicants and their families from receiving support.

HB861/ SB788 will help reduce personal expenses for victims, that come with the trauma of gun violence and removes numerous requirements that disqualify victims from victim compensation eligibility. This includes, the requirements that a victim must report a crime to law enforcement within 48 hours and that a victim must “cooperate” with law enforcement. It also helps clarify and expand which relatives are eligible to receive compensation and what types of expenses are eligible for reimbursement to more accurately reflect family structures and the needs of victims. The bill also strikes the concept of the “perfect victim” who may have “contributed” to their own victimization.

Those impacted by violence should be a priority, and not an after thought. We also know that investing in victim services reduces the likelihood of recycling violence. Currently, 40% of survivors in America will be shot again, killed or shot someone else within five years. Investing in victims services is not only the right thing to do, but reduces the number of future acts of violence. We have also seen in many states, not enough victims are getting the help that they need. In New York we’ve seen that only 4% of victims have utilized victims compensation funds, and we believe the numbers in Maryland are comparable. This bill reconstitutes the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board to include more members

with lived experience and those that work directly with victims. The claims process is streamlined in HB861/SB 788 to reduce the unacceptable delays victims currently experience if they engage in the victim compensation process. Enhanced program reporting requirements are included to improve transparency and accountability. Finally, HB 861/SB 788 removes the counterproductive reliance on criminal justice fines and fees to fund these benefits, creating greater program stability.

Community Justice urges you all today to support HB 861/ Senate Bill 788 and invest in protecting victims of gun violence.

Thank you for your time.