



Testimony in Support of
Criminal Procedure - Victim Compensation - Alterations
(Victim Compensation Reform Act of 2024)
SB 471/HB 575
Executive Director Karen Herren
Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence

February 6, 2024

Dear Chair Smith, Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, and distinguished members of the committee,

Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence (MPGV) is a statewide organization dedicated to reducing gun deaths and injuries in Maryland. We urge the committee for an **Favorable report on Senate Bill 471**.

SB 471 is a crucial measure aimed at reforming victim compensation processes in our state. Victim compensation is not just a matter of financial aid; it is about public safety and human dignity. By addressing the needs of victims without judgment or barriers, we not only provide immediate relief but also foster long-term resilience in our communities.

The current system disproportionately disenfranchises applicants of color, particularly Black men and youth impacted by gun violence. Maryland's shockingly low grant rates and the denial of over 60% of claims in FY23, including those related to domestic violence, underscore the urgent need for reform. SB 471 removes stifling requirements and redefines eligibility criteria to reflect the diverse realities of victims and their families. By dismantling the notion of the "perfect victim" and enhancing program transparency, the bill restores dignity and agency to those who have suffered.

Gun violence survivors endure profound and enduring trauma that extends far beyond physical wounds. The emotional and psychological toll of such violence is pervasive and often unaddressed, leaving survivors struggling to access essential support services. Trauma knows no timetable or boundaries, and survivors require sustained counseling and care to navigate the complex journey toward healing. By streamlining the claims process and expanding access to critical resources, SB 471 acknowledges the multifaceted needs of survivors and reaffirms Maryland's commitment to their well-being.

Supporting this bill is not just a matter of policy; it is a moral imperative. Investing in victim compensation reform is a demonstration of Maryland's dedication to justice, equity, and the fundamental dignity of every individual affected by violence. MPGV urges a **FAVORABLE** report on SB 471.