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Maryland General Assembly- Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
2 East  
Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Letter of support for SB 471 Criminal Procedure – Victim Compensation - Alterations

February 8, 2024

Chair Smith and the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee,

The Health Alliance for Violence Intervention (HAVI) is pleased to support SB 471 “Criminal Procedure - Victim Compensation - Alterations.” This bill would reform our state’s victim compensation system to ensure it is accessible to all victims of crime. We respectfully ask that your committee provide a favorable report for this important legislation.

The HAVI represents a national network of hospital-based violence intervention programs (HVIPs). HVIPs are victim service providers that use patient-focused strategies to break the cycle of violence and reduce rates of repeat injury. Founded in 2009, the HAVI represents 50 programs across the United States. In fact, the R Adams Cowley Shock Trauma Center Violence Intervention Program was one of our founding members, with UM Capital Region Health, Johns Hopkins Hospital, Lifebridge Health, Youth Advocate Programs, and the ROAR Center subsequently joining.

As service providers who care for survivors of community violence, our collective experience is that the existing victim compensation system in Maryland is wholly inaccessible for survivors of community violence. Our clients, typically Black and Brown young men who have survived gunshot wounds, are almost universally denied compensation. This both re-traumatizes survivors and adds an unjust financial burden to an already challenging recovery.

This lack of access impedes our ability to promote community safety in the communities hardest hit by gun violence. It means that survivors face challenges accessing medical care, mental health services, and securing basic needs such as food and housing. This has the combined effect of perpetuating the cycle of violence.

Fortunately, this bill addresses the barriers which have locked survivors of gun violence out of the existing system. It removes the requirement that victims must report a crime within 48 hours, an eligibility criterion typically unknown to survivors until after they apply. SB 471 removes requirements that a victim must “cooperate” with law enforcement- a vague term with vastly different meanings between members of law enforcement and the communities

they serve. Additionally, it strikes the concept of the "model victim" which is a flawed, outdated, and unjust concept.

In addition to these reforms that directly support victims, the bill has several provisions to improve the overall system. In order to adapt the program to meet an evolving challenge, it increases the size of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board to ensure survivors of violence and victim service providers are engaged in the process. The bill removes unnecessary bureaucratic red tape by expanding the types of evidence victims may submit, such as medical records or documentation from victim services organizations. Finally, it creates a streamlined process for time-sensitive financial needs like funeral expenses, crime scene cleanup and one-time emergency relocation services.

We believe SB 471 is an important step to ensure survivors of community violence have the resources needed to fully recover after their injuries. Although it was not intended this way, in practice, the existing system picks winners and losers by perpetuating a harmful trope of "deserving" and "underserving" victims. This is not only immoral, but perpetuates the cycle of violence.

For these reasons, we ask that the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee provide a favorable report on SB 471 Criminal Procedure – Victim Compensation - Alterations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kyle Fischer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kyle" and last name "Fischer" clearly distinguishable.

Kyle Fischer, MD, MPH  
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