



MARIAN HOUSE

Women Moving from Dependence to Independence

TESTIMONY ON HB 575/ SB 471
Criminal Procedure - Victim Compensation – Alterations
Victim Compensation Reform Act of 2024

February 4, 2024

Marian House strongly supports HB 575/SB 471, which will create an accessible, non-discriminatory victim compensation process to support all victims of crime, or their family members left behind. It will provide prompt and crucial financial support when it is needed most and remove unnecessary and arbitrary denials of financial relief for applicants for expenses incurred as a result of being a victim of crime.

Marian House is a holistic community that provides women and their children with housing and wrap around support services. Marian House provides safe, sober, and loving environment that challenges women to respect and love themselves, confront emotional and socioeconomic barriers, and transition to stable and independent lives.

Victim Compensation is about public safety. By assisting with the destabilizing of expenses that come with the trauma of violent victimization, such as medical care, mental health care, lost wages, funeral and burial expenses, crime scene cleanup and more, compensation helps reduce the risk of future victimization and perpetration of harm, and the long-term costs of violence to the state. The current victim compensation process disproportionately disqualifies and alienates applicants of color and their families from receiving compensation at alarming rates, especially Black men and youth impacted by gun and other forms of community violence. Maryland has one of the lowest grant rates of victim compensation in the country. Over 60% of all claims were denied victim compensation in Maryland as ineligible or closed without any compensation in FY23, with no victim of domestic violence related crimes awarded compensation.

HB 575/SB 471 removes numerous requirements that bar victims from eligibility for victim compensation, including 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 reflect family structures and the needs of victims more accurately. The bill also strikes the concept of the “perfect victim” who may have “contributed” to their own victimization. A large body of evidence and lived experience demonstrates this has not been effective at helping people heal and preventing future victimization; rather, it has too often exacerbated the trauma victims experience in the aftermath of violent crime. 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 to reduce the unacceptable delays victims currently experience if they engage in the compensation process. Enhanced program reporting requirements are included to improve transparency and accountability.

Marian House is eager to support the Victim Compensation Reform bill (HB 575/SB). Marian House serves a population of primarily women of color and their children. Our residents often have limited financial resources and have experienced significant levels of victimization and subsequent trauma. HB 575/SB has the potential to help our residents move towards overcoming some of their trauma through access to therapeutic resources that may not be currently available to them. The hope is that these additional resources will assist our residents and others like them in achieving their life goals.

For the above stated reasons, **Marian House strongly urges a favorable report on HB 575/SB 471**

Thank you for your support,

Katie Allston, LCSW-C
President and CEO