



Nadine Finigan-Carr, PhD  
Executive Director  
601 West Lombard Street, Suite 429  
Baltimore, MD 21201

**TESTIMONY ON HB 575/ SB 471**  
**Criminal Procedure - Victim Compensation – Alterations**  
***Victim Compensation Reform Act of 2024***  
**February 6, 2023 / February 9, 2023**

**The University of Maryland, Baltimore Center for Violence Prevention (CVP) 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.

For more than a decade, the CVP through our Prevention of Adolescent Risks Initiative has worked to build the infrastructure here in Maryland to support children and youth victims of human trafficking. Most of them have been traumatized and are leery of cooperating with law enforcement. In some cases, the crime against them is not a one-time event but occurred over time. For these vulnerable minors and their families, going through a mandatory reporting process is retraumatizing. Many victims of human trafficking and exploitation have been forced to commit crimes by their trafficker and are currently ineligible for compensation under the current law as a result. By removing barriers and restrictions on these victims, the compensation received would reduce their risk for continued victimization and improve their chances for success in recovering from their trauma.

Victim Compensation is about public safety. By assisting with the destabilizing expenses that come with the trauma of violent victimization, such as medical care, mental health care, and other trauma recovery services, 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 more accurately reflect family structures and the needs of victims. The bill also ends eligibility exclusions that effectively blame victims for their own victimization. These types of exclusions have a disparate impact on Black victims and their families. 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.

For all of the reasons stated above, the UMB CVP supports HB 575/SB471 and respectfully encourages a favorable report