



**TESTIMONY ON HB 575/SB 471**  
**Criminal Procedure - Victim Compensation - Alterations**  
**February 6, 2024**

**Alliance for Safety and Justice and Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice strongly support HB 575/SB 471**, which reflects national best practices to 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.

The Alliance for Safety and Justice (ASJ) is a multi-state organization that aims to advance public safety priorities rooted in community health, rehabilitation, and support for crime victims. Through our flagship program, Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice (CSSJ), we represent a growing network of nearly 200,000 crime survivors across the country advocating for new safety solutions. Alliance for Safety and Justice and Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice have spent the last decade advocating in states across the country for policies that remove barriers to trauma recovery for survivors, and stop cycles of crime.

Unresolved trauma can lead to someone becoming a victim again and reduce safety, with costly long-term consequences for individuals, families, and the community. According to a [national poll](#) Alliance for Safety and Justice conducted in 2022, nearly two-thirds of violent crime victims have been victimized more than once in the last 10-years. Making sure survivors have what they need to stabilize and heal following victimization is essential to reducing violence and improving safety. Victims often face exorbitant out-of-pocket costs for urgent expenses arising from victimization. In some cases, survivors face losing stable housing when their homes become unsafe. Without support, survivors may have to scramble to raise funds while traumatized or grieving – or not get the help they need at all.

Victim compensation can play a critical role in survivor healing and public safety. Every state has a program, which can cover critical costs like counseling, funeral expenses, and lost wages. The program is the payor of last resort - survivors only receive compensation if they have no other means of covering an expense. Coverage can be a lifeline that allows survivors to focus on healing. But too many victims are denied help. The situation in Maryland is even more dire – over 60% of all claims were denied as ineligible or closed without any compensation in FY23, with no victim of domestic violence awarded compensation. **Maryland has one of the lowest grant rates in the country.**

While people from all walks of life are impacted by crime and violence, its effects are concentrated and unequal. Bureaucratic processes and unfair eligibility regulations currently exclude too many people harmed by violent crime in Maryland from accessing victim compensation in their time of need. These processes and restrictions have a disproportionate

impact on communities of color: people of color and other marginalized survivors face barriers in law and practice that make it even harder to receive help.

HB 575 is designed to address the barriers in Maryland's victim compensation program that are keeping survivors from accessing help. The legislation:

- *Removes the requirement that a victim must report a crime to law enforcement within 48 hours, and that a victim must "cooperate."* Getting victims help to address trauma increases safety, and restrictive reporting and cooperation requirements keep survivors from getting help, undermining rather than promoting cooperation. For these reasons, [a number of states](#) including Louisiana, New Mexico, and Oregon have passed legislation in recent years to allow survivors to use other forms of reliable documentation to verify their victimization.
- *Clarifies and expands which family members 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.* Maryland would join a number of states including Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, California, Delaware, and Vermont that have changed laws in recent years to recognize the impact of violence on more family members, and to cover more critical costs.
- *Strikes the concept of the "perfect victim" who did not "contribute" 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. Members in the Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice network have shared that these kinds of determinations can send the message to survivors that they are not worthy of help to heal, and compound trauma.
- *Reconstitutes the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board to include more members with lived experience and those that work directly with victims.*
- *Streamlines the claims process 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.

For the above stated reasons, Alliance for Safety and Justice and Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice **strongly urge a favorable report on HB 575.**

Sincerely,

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