

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

I, Shayla Francis, 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.

My name is Shayla Francis. I am 28 years old and I am a nail tech. I was born and raised in Baltimore City. On October 23, 2022, I was shot four times walking to my car. I was down federal hill celebrating my sister's 21st birthday and on my way out some people started fighting. After mistakenly following us towards my car, a shooter started to shoot aimlessly down the street. Before I had a chance to realize I was actually being shot, I ran to protect my sister. I was able to keep everyone, including myself calm so that they could get me to the hospital. I had been shot four times, in my hand, chest, wrist and my artery in my upper arm. I went through the process of sitting in the ER for hours before being treated. Due to the delayed response time, I had to have my finger amputated after 5 unsuccessful surgeries to have it repaired. Within 3 months, I started to lose everything I'd worked for. I had just opened my first salon in January. I am a nail tech, as you could imagine, it's extremely difficult to do nails without the use of both hands. I could not do tasks as simple as opening a bottle or jar, putting my hair in a ponytail, literally I needed assistance with everything.

When I was in the hospital I was approached by an organization who told me about the CICB program and encouraged me to apply. He ensured me that I would have the support, whether it be financial, emotional or just general support, that I needed during this time. After months of hounding, I finally heated back from someone. I was told I could not be helped. There would be no money, no relocating, no therapy-nothing. I was left to again, fend for myself, but this time I had depleted my savings account and exhausted the go fund me my family and friends started for me, so that I could catch up on behind bills in hopes to keep everything. I lost my car, had my electricity shut off and faced eviction. If it wasn't for my family pooling their credit cards, I would have lost everything indefinitely.

My physical therapy was told from my insurance company that my treatment was not medically necessary. Even though the physical proof was evident. I fought hard through sleepless and painful nights, multiple surgeries, defeat and losing everything because I have worked so hard to get where I am. I put everything I have into my craft and LOVE what I do. I may not be able to have full range of motion with my hand, but I fighting to get better everyday. I hope that even if it's too late to help me, that no one else who is experiencing this will get swept under the rug. We need help. My business was my number one priority, next to my health of course, but I couldn't help but to imagine how bad my situation could've been if I had children. The reality is women are experiencing gun violence at a higher rate and receiving no care or assistance. Most of us are moms so even though we're indisposed, we still are forced to make a way from the nothing we were left with.

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, 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 more accurately reflect family structures and the needs of victims. 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.

For the above stated reasons, I, Shayla Francis strongly urges a favorable report on HB 575/SB 471