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INFORMATIONAL TESTIMONY

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The Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy (GOCPP) advises the Governor on criminal justice strategies, coordinates across public safety agencies, and allocates resources statewide to support public safety. Among the resources GOCPP manages are the Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund and the Victim Witness Relocation Fund.

HB605 creates a Gun Violence Relocation Program within GOCPP's Victim Services Unit. The program would provide relocation support to victims of gun violence and their families. A person would be eligible for support through the program if they experience violence near their home or live near a person suspected of having perpetrated gun violence and demonstrate a need for relocation. The program would be required to relocate the victim and their family to a safe location, provide financial assistance for moving expenses, and provide other services, including counseling, legal assistance, job training, and resources for individuals with disabilities.

In administering the program, HB605 requires the Victim Services Unit to collaborate with other State and local agencies to provide comprehensive services, conduct community outreach to educate the public about the program, and ensure that program participants are not denied housing based on their participation. The Unit must also adopt regulations, establish an appeals process, administer the Gun Violence Victim Relocation Fund, and create an oversight commission. The bill would require the Governor to include an appropriation of \$10,000,000 to the Gun Violence Victim Relocation Fund in fiscal year 2028.

GOCPP currently administers two programs that provide services similar to those described in HB180.

- The Criminal Injuries Compensation Board (CICB) (§§11–804 and §11–805 of the Criminal Procedure Article) processes claims for reimbursement from victims and surviving relatives for expenses related to their criminal victimization.

Under current law, CICB can make a one-time emergency award for relocation. Unlike the general CICB process, the claimant would not have to wait to exhaust other payment sources if CICB determines that the usual process would result in an award and that waiting for a formal determination presents an undue hardship. On July 1, 2025, the emergency award amount increased to \$10,000.

- The Victim Witness Relocation Fund (§§11–902 through 11–909 of the Criminal Procedure Article) is funded through GOCPP and administered by the Maryland State’s Attorneys Association and local state’s attorney offices. State’s Attorneys may access this funding to relocate victims of and witnesses to crime. Every SAO in the State can access this relocation funding. Baltimore City receives an additional \$2 million each year for this purpose. If victims or witnesses have difficulties accessing this money, they can file a complaint or report with our office.

GOCPP also provides funding through grant programs to community-based organizations to meet the needs of justice-involved people, including housing.

HB605 addresses an important need. Housing is one of the most critical needs facing not just victims of crime but many Marylanders. As a funding agency, GOCPP manages funding for existing relocation programs. GOCPP is not a direct services agency and does not have the capacity or resources to provide the critical but resource-intensive support outlined by HB605.