

# SUPPORT VICTIM COMPENSATION REFORM

**HB 575/SB 471**

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## ABOUT THIS BILL


This bill will create a non-discriminatory victim compensation process that is accessible to 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 victims of crimes.


## BENEFITING ALL VICTIMS OF CRIME


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.

## WHY IT MATTERS!

 The current 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.

 Only 1 domestic violence related claim was paid in the last 5 fiscal years even though there were over 30,000 domestic violence crimes committed in each of those fiscal years.

 Over half of all claims were denied as ineligible or closed without any compensation in FY22.

 Maryland has one of the lowest grant rates of victim compensation in the country.



## EXPANDS ELIGIBILITY

Applying for victim compensation in Maryland is an unduly cumbersome and arduous process that deters many victims from even attempting to apply. This bill:

- Redefines which relatives can receive compensation to include domestic partners and any dependents including household members.
- Includes relocation costs, childcare expenses incurred as a result of seeking medical or psychological care, and transportation expenses incurred as a result of seeking medical or psychological care as allowable expenses that can be recovered under victim compensation.
- Increases the amounts that can be recovered under victim compensation for funerals, psychiatric, psychological or mental health counseling, and crime scene cleanups.



## REMOVES BARRIERS

HB 575/SB 471 removes unnecessary barriers that prevents victims and their loved ones from accessing compensation including:

- The requirement that a victim must report the crime to law enforcement within 48 hours.
- The requirement that a victim must "cooperate" with law enforcement.
- The concept of a "perfect victim" and that a victim may have contributed to their victimization.
- Includes enabling appropriation language beginning in FY 26 which supports the goal to remove the counter productive reliance on fines and fees.

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## IMPROVES THE PROCESS

This bill updates Maryland's victim compensation laws to better reflect the diversity of families and various needs for compensation by:

- Reconstituting the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board to include more members with lived experience and those that work directly with victims of violence.
- Streamlining the claims determination process to reduce unnecessary delays in awarding compensation at a time when victims are most in need.
- Enhancing the program's reporting requirements to increase transparency and to allow a better understanding regarding what claims are approved and denied and why.