

February 9, 2021

Chair Manning, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Thomas and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to support SB 36.

In the days after the love of my life, Donald, was murdered in 2007, I wrestled with unspeakable grief. How would I make it through the day without the man who had been by my side since high school? How would I raise our two children without their father? When Donald was killed at the age of 23, I was working two jobs and putting myself through college. In an instant, I became a single parent responsible for supporting all of us and confronting our collective trauma.

Alongside the challenges of navigating my trauma, there were more immediate concerns: how would I meet the developmental and education needs of my children, as well as their trauma? How would I, reeling from this violence, navigate a complex system to get myself and my children the help we need?

Ohio law states that victims of violent crime and their families can receive victim [compensation](#) to help put their lives back together. But too often, families like mine who need this assistance the most find that these funds are distributed unevenly, or not at all. After their father was murdered, my children were denied victim's compensation because Donald had been charged with a minor drug possession felony as a teenager. My family is far from alone in facing this barrier. Following the [tragic shooting](#) in Dayton last August, at least 19 victims [did not receive compensation](#) due to prior felony convictions or substance abuse issues.

Rules that bar victims' families like mine from life-saving funds because of addiction issues or minor felony convictions ignore the reality that no one asks to be a victim of violent crime. No family expects their loved one to be shot and killed while out to dinner with their friends or beaten to death like Donald was. And a victim's battle with drug addiction or their years-old criminal conviction shouldn't bar their families from getting the help they need.

SB 36 would remove these obstacles for crime survivors, facilitating better access to victim compensation. It would be another important step forward for Ohio.

Following my own battle, I knew I needed to transform my pain into action. I went back to school and earned my Master's degree in social work. Then, in 2019, I worked with other crime survivors to help address the challenges that families like mine experience. It was an honor to meet and work with Ohio Governor Mike DeWine and Attorney General Dave Yost to make important changes – both have shared their continued support for victims of crime.

In 2017, Ohio members of Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice, partnered with then-Attorney General Mike DeWine, [to create](#) trauma recovery centers across Ohio. These centers work to provide families like mine with trauma counseling, and necessities like food, clothing, housing and transportation. Trauma recovery center advocates also help families apply for victim's compensation and access legal services.

These centers work. With the help of a trauma recovery center, [74 percent of patients](#) report an improvement in their overall mental health. In Ohio, these centers are a one-stop shop for families like mine to help break the cycle of trauma and give us the tools we need to not only survive, but to thrive. But there is more work to be done to ensure victim's compensation reaches those who truly need it. We must make sure that even in these times of economic crisis, trauma recovery centers have the funds they need to help families heal.

Only by addressing the trauma of violent crime and the ripple effects it has throughout our lives can we end the cycle of harm it creates. When we talk about how to combat crime in our state and across our country, we must ensure survivors and victims' families have a seat at the table. We know firsthand the human toll that crime takes, and the support we need to heal. We know all too well that crime victims need more support, not less. I can't bring Donald back, but I can speak out to show that there is a way to rise above the pain.

India Brown
ms.india.c.brown@gmail.com
216-820-5756

India Brown is an Ohio member of Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice, a national network of over 40,000 crime survivors across the country and a flagship program of the Alliance for Safety and Justice.