

December 16, 2020

Chairman Lang, Vice Chairman Plummer, Ranking Member Leland and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee:

My name is Brenda Glass, I am the founder and executive director of the Brenda Glass Trauma Center. Our mission is to provide comprehensive outreach, case management, peer support and mental health services to underserved, hard to reach victims of violent crime. I stand before you to express my support of Senate Bill 369.

I am a state licensed independent clinical social worker, with years of experience in case management, chemical dependency counseling, and trauma recovery therapeutic healing support. As a trauma recovery provider, I work to remove barriers to care and enable survivors to envision hope and actively engage in healing holistically. We strive to meet each client where they are, physically and emotionally – providing support that addresses practical needs such as safe housing, financial support, basic living needs, legal advocacy, and individualized therapy.

The types of trauma that we treat are the result of domestic violence, sexual assault and other physical assaults, criminal motor vehicle accidents, community-related violence, and losing a loved one to homicide. The trauma recovery center model acknowledges that trauma can have a devastating impact on people at an emotional, physical, spiritual, and financial level, and our staff is dedicated to helping people heal from violence in all these areas.

In collaboration with the Alliance for Safety and Justice in 2017, the Ohio Attorney General's office launched the Ohio Trauma Recovery Center System of care to support underserved victims of crime. I am honored to have been one of the first Trauma Recovery Center directors in the state of Ohio, serving on the steering committee of the National Association of Trauma Centers. I am also proud to be a member of the Cleveland chapter of Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice, a national network of over 42,000 crime victims with several local chapters in our state. I have worked with hundreds of crime victims: people who have experienced a tremendous amount of trauma, often unexpectedly. My clients are hit with a rush of emotion as they grapple with the violence that entered their lives, which can often trigger their prior unaddressed trauma.

When people experience trauma, it can result in exaggerated startle response, PTSD, anxiety, depression, anxiety, loss of sleep, panic attacks, anger, hyper-awareness, isolation, insomnia and sleep disturbances. Crime victims often describe feeling “out of sorts” and guilty because they feel that they should have been able to do something to prevent their victimization. Consequently, they develop a distorted and negative view of themselves.

Given all the various ways that people respond to trauma, it's no surprise that unaddressed trauma can lead to substance use. Many of the crime victims I work with have experienced prior trauma and received little-to-no support. Unaddressed trauma and addiction too often go hand-in-hand. Without the proper support, many crime victims turn to substances to numb their trauma and feelings of pain.

Healing after victimization is complex; barriers to support and services add to the complexities and further interfere with recovery.

Too many times, I have been in the unfortunate situation of informing crime victims that they are ineligible for crime victim compensation, a program to assist survivors with covering the costs of recovery support, like therapy, medical costs, loss of wages, and even funeral expenses for families of homicide victims.

I worked with one woman after she was the victim of gun violence. She was a mother and a State Tested Nursing Assistant in Ohio. Due to complications related to the shooting, she was unable to walk and consequently unable to work. She suffered terrible anxiety, exaggerated startle response and PTSD. She applied for victim's compensation but was denied because of an old conviction from seven years ago for minor drug possession. This woman, who had survived child sexual abuse, domestic violence and a bullet, was being denied a much-needed lifeline because at one point in her life she turned to drugs when support was not made available to her.

That is unconscionable.

In another instance, I worked with a man after he became the unfortunate victim of gun violence while in his vehicle talking on the phone after work. He worked in manufacturing, but following the shooting he was unable to return to work because he also couldn't walk. His inability to walk, work and support his child/children led to depression and anxiety. When I delivered the news to him that he was denied victim compensation, I saw hope leave his face. He was denied due to an eight year-old drug possession conviction .

Crime victims often experience mental health challenges, substance abuse, housing instability, disruption in employment, re-victimization and contact with the justice system. By removing barriers to their healing journey, we can help crime victims avoid many of these challenges.

The last thing crime victims need when they are at the most vulnerable time of their life are barriers and humiliation. Old criminal convictions are used to box people in; for victims of crime who also have prior convictions, they are used to deny support.

I support SB 369 and urge you to pass it into law.

Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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