

December 16, 2020

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

I am Stephen Massey, director of operations of the CitiLookout Trauma Recovery Center in Springfield. Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in on SB369, a bill I strongly support.

Anyone who has been hurt by crime, especially a violent crime like assault, attempted murder, or the murder of a loved one, will need support recovering from the experience. This is why Ohio, through the attorney general's office, provides victim compensation to crime survivors. It is also why the state established trauma recovery centers (TRCs): to serve individuals in communities that are hardest hit by crime and violence yet least likely to access the resources available to help them recover.

Unfortunately, some Ohio crime victims still do not get the support they need because of laws governing these systems. Now, with equal parts compassion and commitment to ending cycles of crime and violence, lawmakers are moving to address this. As the head of a TRC and someone with first-hand experience helping crime survivors, I cannot overstate the importance of the change being advanced through Senate Bill 369.

Ohio's trauma recovery centers offer a holistic range of services—from substance-abuse treatment and specialized sexual assault or domestic violence counseling, to legal advocacy and spiritual guidance. A large percentage of our clients are both high risk for being victimized and similarly unlikely to get help from traditional providers, like health insurance and government programs. Since 2017, when then-Attorney General Mike DeWine launched the first TRCs with support from the [Alliance for Safety and Justice](#), the centers have helped Ohioans process the emotional impact of their experience and navigate the practical fallout of being victimized—such as applying for lost income, working with law enforcement on ongoing investigations, and even finding new, safer housing.

Without this kind of support, crime victims can get caught in a downward spiral of trauma and hopelessness that can lead to depression, substance use and more. Many of the crime victims I work with have experienced prior trauma, received no support and were re-victimized as a result.

Our current attorney general, Dave Yost, has been a determined advocate of victim services and a reliable ally for those of us working in the state's TRCs. Yet, because of outdated restrictions in law, many people in need are still being denied life-saving support. In particular, crime victims with a prior history with the criminal justice system or with evidence of substance use are currently ineligible for victim services from the state. This unnecessary cruelty was conspicuously documented earlier this year in a report by the [Dayton Daily News](#), which found 19 victims in the Oregon District shooting were rejected for legitimately needed victim services.

The consequences of these exclusions are dismal. In just the past few weeks, I have had to tell two men who survived gunshots to the head and back that the state of Ohio would not provide them with victim compensation support, simply because they had felonies four and six years ago, respectively. These basic victim services include support for medical and mental health treatment, reimbursements for lost wages and to replace clothes destroyed by bullets and blood, and burial

costs incurred by families, among other help. The look on both men's faces told me they understood the denial as evidence that Ohio does not care about them, their lives or their safety.

Delivering such a message is not only heartbreaking and unjust, but it also amounts to bad public safety policy: Why should those victimized by violence be denied support to recover, because of something that occurred years earlier for which they already paid their debt?

This is why I am feeling hopeful about newly proposed legislation that would reduce such exclusions. SB 369, recently introduced by Senators Peggy Lehner and Nathan Manning, would lower the barriers to victim compensation for people living with past convictions who have served their time. It would also end the practice of using toxicology reports to deny compensation to critically injured victims and families of victims of sexual assault and murder. Ohio is still struggling with an addiction epidemic, and it makes no sense to drive people who need help further into substance abuse by denying them support.

Our state is wise to provide victim services. It is also rightfully proud to be a national leader in supporting trauma recovery centers, which are funded by federal Victims of Crime Act funding. Updating our laws and expanding our care for crime victims by passing SB 369 will make us even prouder. By helping people in great need, who have been hurt through no fault of their own, it will make our state a safer place for us all.

Thank you.

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