

Chair LaRae and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee

My name is Benda 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 this committee to express my support of SB36.

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. We 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 entitlements, basic needs, and legal advocacy, as well as individualized therapy. The types of trauma that are treated include domestic violence, sexual assaults and other physical assaults, criminal motor vehicle accidents, community-related violence, and people who have lost 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 2017 in collaboration with the Alliance for Safety and Justice, the Ohio Attorney General's office launched the Ohio Trauma Recovery Center System of care to support underserved victims of crime on their healing journey. I am honored to be one of the first Trauma Recovery Center directors in the state of Ohio, to serve on the steering committee of the National Association of Trauma Centers and to be a member of the Cleveland chapter of the Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice.

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 often triggers prior unaddressed trauma. When people experience trauma, they can experience exaggerated startled response, PTSD, anxiety, depression, anxiety, loss of sleep, panic attacks, anger, hyper awareness, the desire to isolate, and sleep disturbance. Crime victims often describe feeling out of sorts. Crime victims often express feelings of guilt 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 many ways that we respond to trauma it's no surprise that unaddressed trauma can lead to drug use. Many of the crime victims I work with have experienced prior trauma and received little to no support. Unaddressed trauma and addiction go hand in hand. Without the proper support many crime victims do turn to substances to numb their symptoms of trauma and their pain.

Healing post victimization is complex, barriers to support and services add to the complexities and further interfere with recovering after victimization.

Too many times I have been in the unfortunate situation of informing crime victims that they are ineligible for victims of crime compensation, a fund which assists with funeral, housing and loss of wages.

I worked with one woman who came to me after she became the victim of gun violence. She was a mother and STNA. Due to complications related to the shooting she was unable to walk and consequently unable to work. She suffered terrible anxiety, exaggerated startled response and PTSD. She applied for victim's compensation. She was denied due to a 7-year-old prior conviction 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.

I worked with a man who came to me after he became the victim of gun violence while in his vehicle talking on the phone after work. He worked in manufacturing, following the shooting he was unable to return to work because he was unable to walk. His inability to walk, work and pay child support lead to depression and anxiety. He was denied victims compensation and when I delivered this news to him, I saw hope leave his face. This man was denied due to an 8 -year-old conviction for drug possession.

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 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 SB36 and urge you to do the same.