



State of Rhode Island
Office of the General Treasurer

James A. Diossa
General Treasurer

11 April 2024

The Honorable Marvin Abney
Chair, House Finance Committee

The Honorable Members of the House Finance Committee

RE: *Concerning 2024-H 7479, An Act Relating to Criminal Procedure – Criminal Injuries Compensation*

Chair Abney:

I write in strong support of 2024-H 7479, introduced by Deputy Speaker Hull at my request. This legislation would re-establish a secure funding source for the Crime Victim Compensation Program (“CVCP”).

Administered by the Office of the General Treasurer, the CVCP helps thousands of innocent victims cover the economic cost of crime, whether it be medical expenses, the cost of physical relocation, or lost earnings. Over the past four years, the CVCP has helped over 1,300 individuals and impacted thousands across our state.

Traditionally, the CVCP is funded by grants under the federal Victims of Crime Act (the “VOCA”) and from in-state court fines and fees, criminal restitution, and court orders on any criminal charged with a felony, misdemeanor, or petty misdemeanor in Rhode Island. *See* R.I. Gen. Laws § 12-25-28. Through the VOCA, the federal government provides a 75% match of *state* expenditures in the preceding fiscal year.

In recent years, however, state funding has steadily declined because of well-meaning and well-needed reforms to the criminal justice system. Legislation like the Justice Reinvestment Act – for example – lowered criminal penalties and resulted in fewer offenders receiving judicial punishment, both of which have the secondary effect of reducing fines and fees coming into the Program. Since Fiscal Year 2016, Program funds generated by court fines and fees have decreased by over \$400,000. As a result, there has been a corresponding decrease in Program expenditures.

This is a significant loss both to the victims and to the state. Not only are victims receiving less, but the state is not realizing the full benefit of available federal resources. The decline in state funding underscores the need to re-establish a reliable funding mechanism that will supplement court fines and fees and help the state provide meaningful financial assistance to crime victims and their families.

This legislative change is intended to close that funding gap and maximize federal funding. To do so, it would add a \$1.00 surcharge on all civil and criminal traffic violations, exclusive of parking violations, in Rhode Island. This would include offenses like speeding tickets, red light cameras, failure to signal, texting while driving, and headlight or taillight infractions. This surcharge would be *in addition* to the current ticket amount, so this legislation would not be re-allocating existing proceeds. Rather, it would be creating a new funding stream that does not currently exist that would directly benefit innocent victims of crime.

At least 13 other states partially fund their Crime Victim Compensation Program through a charge on traffic violations. Those states have maintained steady funding levels without reliance on annual appropriations from the respective legislative bodies.

I urge this Committee to recommend passage and help Treasury support innocent victims of crime from Woonsocket to Westerly.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JD' or similar initials, enclosed within a circular flourish.

James A. Diossa
General Treasurer