



Rob Hutton

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 13TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Thank you Chairman Kleefisch and members of the Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bill 643 and allowing us to testify. This is an important piece of legislation that provides needed updates to the use of the Crime Victim Compensation Program and its administration so that it may better serve victims as they recover from the acts committed against them.

As we continue to evaluate our criminal justice system it is important that we remember and prioritize the victim of crimes to make the process of recovery as easy as possible. Under current law, Wisconsin has a Crime Victim Compensation Program administered by the Department of Justice. The purpose of this fund is to allow for victims of crime or the relative of a homicide victim to receive immediate compensation for certain losses they have suffered as a result of crime. This includes: payment for funeral expenses, medical and mental health treatment, replacement of property held as evidence, loss of income, and loss of economic benefits to dependents supported by a homicide victim. Victims are eligible for up to \$40,000 per injury and an additional \$2,000 in funeral expenses provided they have reported the crime within 5 days of its occurrence and have applied for funds within 1 year of the crime occurring.

This legislation provides needed changes to update coverage and reflect current laws. Under the bill, we have updated the list of crimes that are now compensable by the program to include criminal statutes enacted in recent years. It would also allow for parental expenses related to crimes committed against children and housing adaptations due to disability from a crime to be reimbursable by the program. Further, the burial allowance is increased from \$2,000 to \$5,000 but is now included in the total \$40,000 in reimbursable expenses.

To streamline administration of the program, the legislation simplifies the calculations by establishing a formula for compensation to a dependent for the loss of the victim's economic support. This gives clarity to the victim and DOJ regarding benefit calculations. We understand this process may be burdensome or overwhelming to recent victims which is why we have included flexibility for DOJ to waive reporting requirements and application timeline requirements in the interest of justice. While these requirements serve a purpose to help ensure accurate and timely information is reported to help catch criminals, we do not want to prevent a victim from receiving needed compensation due to traumatization that prevents them from fulfilling these timeline requirements.

We have worked closely with the Attorney General and the Department of Justice to craft this legislation to help restore victims of crime and hold criminals accountable. DOJ has indicated that the increase in reimbursable offenses and streamlined administration should result in a neutral fiscal effect. I want to thank Senator Petrowski and Attorney General Schimel for their leadership in this process. I am happy to answer any questions on the intent and focus of this legislation and have Jill Karofsky the Executive Director of the Office of Crime Victim Services to help answer technical questions about the fund.