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Hope After Harm

An Evaluation of State Victim Compensation Statutes

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Introduction and summary

We all have a right to feel safe and be free from violence as we go about our daily lives. However, when violence does occur, few are prepared for the unexpected trauma, injury, and expense that can result. When someone experiences violence in the United States, the criminal legal system too often neglects the immediate and long-term needs of survivors of violence, instead disproportionately focusing resources on punishing the person or persons responsible for causing the harm. To address this imbalance, Congress passed the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) in 1984, which established the Crime Victims Fund (CVF) to provide financial support to state crime victim compensation (CVC) programs and victim service providers.¹ Currently, there is a 75 percent federal match for state CVC programs, meaning that for every dollar that a state spends on victim compensation grants to survivors, it receives 75 cents from the federal government.² Despite the key role that financial relief can play in healing after violence, America continues to fail to make necessary investments supporting victims and survivors of violence. In fiscal year 2021, state and local governments spent a combined \$274 billion on police, corrections, and criminal-legal proceedings.³ That same year, the federal CVF was capped at slightly more than \$2 billion.⁴

Too often, survivors are left to deal with the lasting and compounding effects of their victimization without support; the results—which can include bankruptcy, chronic illness, depression, and anxiety—are devastating.⁵ While financial support alone cannot eliminate the lifelong pain and trauma associated with victimization, research shows that financial-induced stress following harm is a stronger predictor of the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than victimization itself.⁶ As such, victim compensation can be lifesaving. By federal law, CVC programs must cover out-of-pocket expenses such as medical bills, burial costs, and lock replacement that are not covered by other means, including private insurance, Medicare, or Medicaid.⁷ As such, CVC programs have the potential to aid survivors who have no other means of support.

Moreover, victim compensation programs can help to break cycles of violence. The adage “hurt people, hurt people” rings true.⁸ While most survivors do not engage in future violence, the fact remains that people who commit violence often have experienced it themselves.⁹ This may be the case especially for people living in neighborhoods that experience frequent violence¹⁰ and who, due to systemic disinvestment and inequities, do not have access to healing resources such as adequate social services or medical or mental health care. When survivors receive the support they need to heal, they are less likely to commit harm.¹¹ What is more, healed people, heal people.¹² Providing survivors with victim compensation to meet unexpected costs associated with experiencing violence opens doors for intergenerational and community healing, as the impacts of untreated trauma and economic instability can ripple and compound to their families and communities at large. Victim compensation programs, therefore, have the potential to not only deliver on the promise to make survivors safer, but to help break cycles of violence, thereby making entire communities safer.

State CVC programs

In 1984, Congress passed the VOCA, creating the CVF, which would be administered by the federal OVC.¹³ The CVF is not funded by general tax revenue, but instead “financed by fines and penalties from convictions in federal cases.”¹⁴ After the VOCA Fix to Sustain the Crime Victims Fund Act (VOCA Fix Act) was signed into law in 2021, this was expanded to include funds collected from “federal deferred prosecution and non-prosecution agreements.”¹⁵ Using the CVF, the OVC administers supplemental funding to eligible state CVC programs.¹⁶ All 50 states and territories, including Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico, have CVC programs¹⁷ through which survivors can apply for financial support to cover unexpected, out-of-pocket expenses that can arise as a result of violent victimization as a last resort.¹⁸ With the passage of the VOCA Fix Act, the OVC awards grants to state CVC programs at 75 percent of the previous year’s payouts.¹⁹

To be eligible to receive a federal grant, a state CVC program must cover medical care, mental health care, lost wages, and funeral expenses for eligible victims who apply for compensation.²⁰ Beyond this requirement however, states have broad autonomy over the administration of their CVC programs, including which survivor-related expenses are covered beyond the minimum requirements, as well as establishing application and eligibility requirements for those seeking financial relief. As this report shows, there are numerous examples of how the administration of each state’s victim compensation programs vary. However, they all share the same goal: to help those who have been harmed heal by offsetting the exorbitant costs associated with being a survivor.

Unfortunately, state CVC programs, although vital, are underutilized across the United States due to a variety of institutional and bureaucratic barriers that have undermined their ability to reach those most in need of support. Issues such as lack of public awareness and accessibility, stringent requirements, and arcane rules can make survivors feel like they are being blamed for their victimization or that they do not deserve help. In practice, many CVC administrative practices and mandates, often required by state law, prevent victim compensation programs from reaching those most in need of support.

In 2023, 3,861,360 people aged 12 or older in the United States were violently victimized.²¹ And while all survivors do not need or seek compensation, that same year, state victim compensation programs received applications from only 232,582 people—slightly more than 6 percent of all those who were victimized.²² This is particularly glaring given that populations with the highest risk of serious violent victimization are statistically the least likely to access victim services.²³ Survivors' receipt of victim compensation is also racially inequitable. Per research conducted by The Associated Press, between 2018 and 2021, in 19 of 23 surveyed states, Black survivors were disproportionately denied victim compensation.²⁴ According to the AP's reporting, "The denials added up to thousands of Black families each year collectively missing out on millions of dollars in aid."²⁵ These rampant disparities make improving victim compensation programs a racial justice issue,²⁶ which can be addressed by revisiting and reforming state statutes that contribute to inequitable access to victim compensation.

Investing in victim compensation can also save states money in the long run. The National Opinion Research Center (NORC) estimates that the cost of harm per victim of aggravated assault—which factors emergency department visits, inpatient and outpatient costs, rehabilitation and long-term care, mental health care, productivity loss, property loss, and risk of death—is \$49,491.²⁷ In 2023, the FBI reported a total of 866,834 aggravated assaults across the United States.²⁸ This means the estimated total cost of harm to victims of aggravated assaults in the United States in 2023 was nearly \$43 billion. When victims of violence are uninsured or have no other means of paying for the unexpected expenses related to their victimization, states ultimately bear the brunt of these costs. CVC programs, which help break cycles of violence, have the potential to save states billions of dollars per year in avoided emergency health care services, avoided costs associated with the criminal legal system, and by ensuring victims of violence do not experience unnecessary future loss of employment or earnings.

This report, a joint effort of CAP and Common Justice, provides an in-depth examination of victim compensation law in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico titled the “State Victim Compensation Statute Rubric.” (see “Methods”) Based on document analysis of state statutes and insights from survivors of violence, victim service providers, and advocates, the State Victim Compensation Statute Rubric evaluates state statute and regulations based on 30 criteria that affect awareness of, compensation from, eligibility for, and experience with the victim compensation process.

Crucially, this report recommends five legislative and administrative actions states can take to better support survivors of violence:

1. Raise awareness and increase outreach about victim compensation programs and what they entail, especially in Black and brown communities that disproportionately experience victimization. Track awareness and outreach efforts.
2. Make the application processes less arduous and more trauma-informed by reducing required paperwork, expanding application windows, and offering substantive support to survivors.
3. Reduce law enforcement’s role in determining victim compensation eligibility and award amounts.
4. Move away from reimbursement-based models and increase the amount of compensation available for burial expenses.
5. Listen to survivors.

Importantly, the State Victim Compensation Statute Rubric does not exist outside the context of changes states have already made to promote the greatest amount of equity, access, and transparency to victim compensation. For every category scored in the evaluation rubric, the authors offer a corresponding model policy which we encourage legislators to use as a reference for future reform.

State Victim Compensation Statute Rubric

The State Victim Compensation Statute Rubric evaluates 30 standard provisions in state statutes and regulations that govern CVC programs through document analysis. (see “Document analysis”)

This tool will help states reform their victim compensation statutes to better meet the needs of survivors and understand the progress already being made by many advocates, legislators, and administrators across the country. Without

a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of state CVC statutes and a tool for changemakers to demand more equitable access to this vital resource, injustices will persist.

This project is designed to fill critical knowledge gaps and catalyze state-level policy changes that improve access, equity, and transparency in the administration of victim compensation awards. CAP and Common Justice are committed to ushering in people-centered changes to victim compensation programs that will reduce barriers and disparities in access, expand utilization, aid survivors in securing the resources they need to heal, and prevent future violence from occurring. The authors hope that survivors, advocates, legislators, administrators, and the public will utilize the materials produced by this project as tools to reform victim compensation programs to serve all survivors of violence better.

In addition to this report, which describes the methodology, results, recommendations, and model policies related to the creation of the State Victim Compensation Statute Rubric, CAP and Common Justice have published individual scoring breakdowns for each state included in the evaluation.

Victim compensation is a lifeboat for survivors in a sea of loss, fear, and financial uncertainty. These funds can help survivors bury loved ones with dignity, prevent homelessness, heal from injury, ensure their own safety, and more. Across the country, many states—regardless of their political alignment, region, economic, or social construction—have deepened their commitment to the universal value that victims and survivors deserve support in the healing process; they have reformed their victim compensation programs to better meet the needs of all survivors. However, this analysis reveals that, while aspects of an inclusive and accessible victim compensation system can be found across the United States, there is still significant work that needs to be done in every state to increase equity, especially racial equity, and to ensure survivors are receiving adequate support in the aftermath of their harm. The authors hope that survivors, legislators, and advocates will use this report and their state evaluations to build upon this important work and look to the report’s recommendations and model policies for guidance on how to build more expansive and inclusive victim compensation programs.



Read the scoring breakdowns:

[Executive Summary: Hope After Harm](#)

Methods

CAP and Common Justice created a rubric and corresponding state fact sheets to provide survivors, advocates, and lawmakers with a tool to assess the strengths and limitations of their state’s victim compensation statute and, as needed, to inform efforts seeking to improve those statutes. The State Victim Compensation Statute Rubric was created through an inductive qualitative research method and reflects statutory best practices for victim compensation programs within four central themes: awareness and accessibility, adequate compensation, eligibility barriers, and experience with the process. To develop the rubric, researchers from CAP and Common Justice conducted document analysis of victim compensation statutes, regulations, and other relevant public documents in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico.

Importantly, this report does not assess the efficacy, efficiency, or fairness of the administration of victim compensation programs in each state as these elements relate directly to applicant outcomes. Instead, it examines the statutes and regulations that govern the programs, which, if reformed, hold the potential to improve and ease the administration of victim compensation in each state. Understanding the importance of learning from other states and survivors when it comes to victim compensation reform, the rubric analysis was limited to written policy as it is necessary to demystify the laws governing state compensation programs, provide state advocates and lawmakers with a more comprehensive look at how their statutes compare with peer states, and offer examples from around the country as to how statute can be written or modified to achieve greater access, equity, and transparency. While recognizing that states’ practices may differ from statutory and regulatory requirements, these policies establish parameters under which programs must operate and may influence how survivors interact with the system based on the information available to them regarding their rights and eligibility as they enter the process.

In addition to document analysis, researchers conducted a series of focus groups with survivors, victim service providers, and advocates and weighted the rubric to reflect participants’ views on what issues are most in need of addressing.

Document analysis

To conduct the document analysis, Common Justice created a guide comprising spreadsheets related to specific subjects, policies, and corresponding questions—including victim compensation statutes for all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico. This guide formed the basis for the final rubric, providing a comparative view of commonly found policies across states. It covers subjects such as policies on the requirement to cooperate with law enforcement, maximum compensation limits, policies pertaining to emergency awards, application windows, and more. This guide was grounded in the organization’s work supporting survivors of violence, previous research on the issue of victim compensation, and efforts to reform New York State’s victim compensation program.²⁹

Using this guide and under the supervision of Common Justice, a team of student interns from Yale Law School collected initial information in the fall of 2023. They researched current and recently revised state laws related to victim compensation in each state and categorized statutes and regulations by state and by policy for further analysis. Subsequently, researchers at CAP and Common Justice reviewed, edited, and updated search results as necessary throughout July 2024 and August 2024. Each researcher reviewed all collected information to minimize errors and ensure consistent and accurate statutory interpretation. All conflicting opinions regarding statutory interpretation were discussed and resolved collaboratively.

Between June 2024 and December 2024, CAP and Common Justice researchers designed a scoring rubric to evaluate how each statute included in the guide should be represented and weighted in a final state score. (see “Rubric design and scoring”)

Outreach to state victim compensation administrators

To mitigate against potential bias in the document analysis process and in the interest of rigorously vetting the information used as the basis for analysis, CAP and Common Justice conducted outreach between January 2025 and May 2025 to all state administering agencies. Using the National Association of Crime Victim Compensation Board’s contact list for state program officers to conduct outreach,³⁰ CAP and Common Justice hosted two informational webinars in March 2025 open to all state victim compensation agencies. The webinars were attended by representatives from 24 state programs, a total of 37 administrators. In each webinar, the authors of this report gave state program administrators an overview of the project’s goals, the methodology used to evaluate state statutes,

key findings, and a preview of the recommendations and model policies based on this research. Administrators attending the webinars were given approximately 30 minutes in each session to ask questions and were provided with a follow-up survey to ask any additional questions that were not taken during the live webinar. In June 2025, before finalizing the results of this analysis and evaluation, the state-based fact sheets and scoring breakdowns included in this report were sent to the respective contacts for each state. Program administrators were given two weeks to review how their state was evaluated and provide feedback or supplemental information about statute or regulation where appropriate.

Focus groups

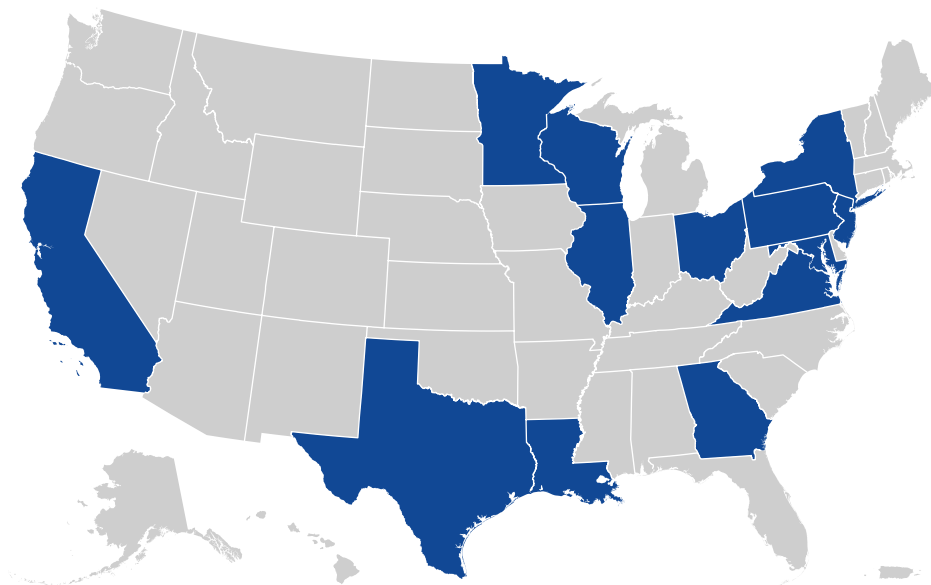
This project is informed by the opinions, expertise, and lived experiences of survivors and those who support them, which researchers gathered via a series of focus groups. Focus group recruitment was conducted in May 2024 and June 2024 via digital flyers and email outreach, targeting a total of 117 representatives from nonprofit and community-based organizations across 12 different states or with a national footprint. In addition, the authors contacted individual survivors who had previously interacted with their organizations and a coalition of victim service providers based in New York State.

During June 2024 and July 2024, the authors held eight focus groups with a total of 28 survivors and two focus groups with a total of six advocates and victim service providers. Each focus group was approximately 90 minutes long and conducted via Zoom. Survivors were invited to share their experiences and were asked open-ended questions about their awareness of the CVC program in their state and, as applicable, their experiences with applying for victim compensation awards. Survivors were also asked if and how their experience interacting with the victim compensation system changed their attitudes about safety, public services, and/or law enforcement, as well as for suggestions regarding policy and programmatic changes. Focus groups were recorded and transcribed. Advocates and providers who participated in focus groups were asked about their experiences supporting victims and survivors seeking compensation, including their immediate needs, strengths and areas for growth in their state's program, as well as recommendations for policy changes. Each focus group participant was required to fill out an intake form that included questions related to consent, their experience with victim compensation programs and services, and basic demographic information. Survivors who participated received a \$100 gift card.

FIGURE 1

Focus group participants attested to experiences with victim compensation in 13 states

States represented by focus group participants



Source: Focus groups were conducted by CAP and Common Justice. Demographic information came from intake forms completed by focus group participants. Alice Hamblett and Chandler Hall, "[Hope After Harm: An Evaluation of State Victim Compensation Statutes](#)" (Washington: Common Justice and Center for American Progress, 2025).

Survivor focus group participants came from 17 different cities in the following states: California, Georgia, Illinois, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Louisiana, Minnesota, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Texas, and Wisconsin. Most survivors who participated in focus groups (86 percent) were women. Seventeen participants identified as only Black or African American, three identified as only white or Caucasian, two identified as only Hispanic or Latino, and one identified as only Native American. Four participants identified as two or more races. One participant did not report their race, age, or gender. Participants ranged in age from 26 to 70, with an average age of 48. Seven survivors reported experiencing harm themselves, 20 reported losing or caring for a harmed loved one, and one survivor reported both experiencing harm and losing or caring for a harmed loved one. Of the 28 participants, 16 applied for victim compensation. One participant applied for compensation in two different states. Among those who applied for victim compensation, seven received full awards, two received reduced awards, four had their applications rejected, and two were awaiting a decision on their application at the time of their focus group. One participant reported being denied an award for one application and receiving a reduced award for another.

FIGURE 2

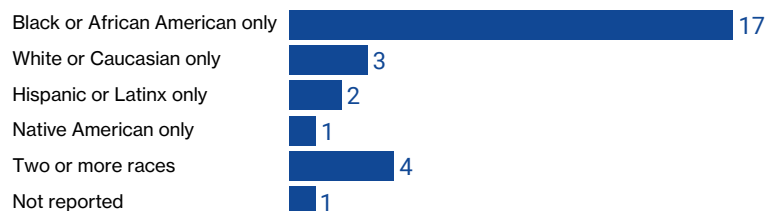
Only 40 percent of focus group participants who applied for victim compensation reported receiving a full award

Focus group demographics by gender identity, racial identity, experience with victimization, and experience with victim compensation

GENDER IDENTITY



RACIAL IDENTITY



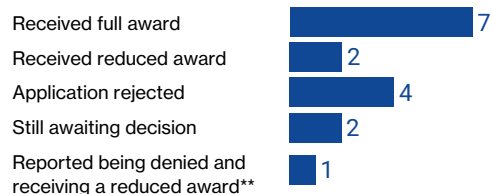
EXPERIENCE WITH VICTIMIZATION*



APPLIED TO VICTIM COMPENSATION



EXPERIENCE WITH VICTIMIZATION



*One participant applied for victim compensation in two different states, which brings the total to 16.

** Separate award applications.

Source: Focus groups were conducted by CAP and Common Justice. Demographic information came from intake forms completed by focus group participants. Alice Hamblett and Chandler Hall, "[Hope After Harm: An Evaluation of State Victim Compensation Statutes](#)" (Washington: Common Justice and Center for American Progress, 2025).

Advocate and provider focus group participants supported survivors in four different states. All identified as women, 50 percent identified as Black or African American, and 50 percent identified as white or Caucasian. Cumulatively, they possessed a total of 85 years of experience working with and/or advocating for survivors of violence. Three participants reported helping survivors access victim compensation directly, and three reported advocating for reform of the victim compensation program or the rights of survivors.

Rubric design and scoring

For each state, a description of each theme as well as a summary of its subcategories, scores for each subcategory, and the explanation for how each score was determined is included in the executive summary.

Based on the authors' research, as well as existing literature and reform efforts, the following four themes were identified for the scoring rubric: awareness and accessibility, adequate compensation, eligibility barriers, and experience with the process. Between June 2024 and September 2024, the authors developed subcategories within each theme, which were identified based on patterns and trends that emerged during document analysis and focus groups. For instance, within the theme of "adequate compensation" the authors include the following subcategories: maximum compensation limit, burial expense coverage limit, and types of eligible expenses.

Broadly, states with policies that represent the most equitable and inclusive provision of victim compensation received all possible points in a subcategory. States with policies that directly exclude survivors from accessing compensation or that have historically led to statistical discrimination receive 0 points in a subcategory. Under certain subcategories, states may receive partial points by including exceptions to such exclusions. For example, most states mandate that an application for victim compensation must be made within a statutorily defined window from the date when the victimization occurred to be considered eligible. However, states that, by statute, waive or extend this requirement if an applicant shows "good cause" or meet other conditions (such as being under the age of 18 at the time of the victimization), receive partial points for this subcategory. While exceptions open doors for specific groups of victims and survivors to be eligible for support, the authors believe in promoting equitable access to victim compensation for all.

Rubric weighting

To ground the rubric grading in the lived experiences of survivors and the work of victim advocates and providers, CAP and Common Justice researchers weighted the four rubric themes based on insights from focus group participants. To achieve this, CAP and Common Justice partnered with Youth Alive!—an organization that supports survivors, works to break cycles of violence, and has been at the forefront of victim compensation program reform in California—to review focus group transcripts.³¹ Reviewers analyzed how the four central themes of the scoring rubric (awareness and accessibility, adequate compensation, experience with the process,

and eligibility barriers) presented in the lived experience of survivors and the work of advocates and providers. In their analysis, reviewers were asked to consider what focus group participants identified as most important to them, not only in their interactions with victim compensation programs but also in the healing process as a whole. For example, many survivors reported having difficulty processing their grief in the immediate aftermath of their or their loved one’s harm. For some, this affected their ability to apply for victim compensation expeditiously. Reviewers also considered more generally how grieving could affect a survivor’s experience with the process and their eligibility to receive compensation if it resulted in missing reporting or application dates, not being emotionally able to return calls of administrators when their case was under review, or foregoing the process entirely as the application itself was retraumatizing. Reviewers were then asked to independently rank the four central themes in accordance with the priority each theme should be given to better align victim compensation with the healing process. Rankings were then co-reviewed, discussed, and averaged to determine the final ranking of each theme.

The corresponding ranking of each theme was mapped to the scoring rubric as a multiplier for each subcategory within a theme. Recognizing that the focus group participants do not represent all survivors’ experiences and all geographic regions, weights were limited to a range between 1 and 2. From most impactful to least, reviewers agreed on the following rankings and weights: eligibility barriers (x1.75), experience with the process (x1.5), awareness and accessibility (x1.25), and adequate compensation (x1). Below is a table detailing the total points a state could receive for each scoring category before and after applying weighting and the total possible points a state could score in the evaluation.

TABLE 1
Total possible points for each scoring category, before and after weighting

Category	Before weighting	Applied weight	After weighting
Awareness and accessibility	6	x1.25	7.5
Adequate compensation	14	x1	14
Eligibility barriers	17	x1.75	29.75
Experience with the process	4	x1.5	6
Total points	41		57.25

Source: Alice Hamblett and Chandler Hall, “[Hope After Harm: An Evaluation of State Victim Compensation Statutes](#)” (Washington: Common Justice and Center for American Progress, 2025).

Awareness and accessibility

Despite the potential of victim compensation programs to improve the lives of survivors, many are unaware of their existence. According to a national poll conducted in 2022 by the Alliance for Safety and Justice, “96 percent of victims of violent crime did not receive victim compensation to help in their recovery.”³² While not every survivor needs or qualifies for victim compensation, this number is still strikingly low. Additionally, as the stories of focus group participants illuminated, even survivors who do apply for victim compensation are often not fully aware of which expenses can and should be covered. For victim compensation programs to realize their full healing potential and promise, survivors must be made aware of the critical financial support that victim compensation programs can provide in the aftermath of violence. As such, the authors evaluated states based on their victim compensation program’s awareness and accessibility.

Requirement to inform survivors

Focus group participants consistently highlighted that a lack of awareness hinders survivors’ access to victim compensation programs. Michelle Barnes-Anderson of Brooklyn, New York, first learned about victim compensation in 2017, when she lost her son, Melquain Jatelle Anderson, to gun violence. She has since founded the Melquain Jatelle Anderson Foundation in his memory, which provides support to victims and survivors of gun violence and their families.³³ Anderson observed:

When I lost my only child, I had no idea the victims’ compensation program even existed. It was the NYPD detectives on the case that informed my family about the program. The lack of awareness about [victim compensation] can mean the difference between finding stability and being completely broken emotionally, mentally, physically, and or financially. It’s disheartening to know many people in the minority and low-income community are suffering in silence—not because help isn’t out there, but because they simply don’t know it exists.³⁴

To bridge this public awareness gap, more active outreach is necessary. Indeed, research has shown that while younger men of color who are victims of physical assault are the least likely to apply for and receive victim compensation, active outreach and assistance with the application process can effectively reduce disparities in victims filing for compensation.³⁵ Codifying policies to improve public awareness is particularly important when it comes to reducing racial and ethnic disparities in access to victim compensation.

Measuring public awareness is challenging. While many states have launched awareness programs and catalog these activities in OVC annual performance measure reports, this practice is not typically codified in law or regulations.³⁶ Some states statutorily mandate that parties that regularly interact with survivors and inform them of the availability of victim compensation. The authors acknowledge that this alone does not entirely address the awareness issue. For example, while Barnes-Anderson was notified of the availability of victim compensation by law enforcement, she still describes a lack of public awareness among communities of color in New York, despite the state mandating that law enforcement notifies victims and survivors of the availability of compensation. However, given the difficulty of measuring public awareness and outreach efforts, the authors ultimately graded states based on whether they included a statutory requirement that medical providers, state attorneys, district attorney's offices, or law enforcement officers inform victims and survivors of their right to compensation. While such a provision in and of itself does not guarantee that survivors are adequately informed, it is the bare minimum necessary to ensure that those who interact with survivors are accountable for making survivors aware of their right to apply for compensation.

Requirement to inform survivors

States receive a maximum of 1 point if, in statute regarding victim compensation or in the state's victims' bill of rights, there is an active requirement that the responsible law enforcement agency, medical provider, district attorney, or state's attorney must inform victims or survivors of the availability of victim compensation.

States receive 0 points if there is no requirement to inform victims or survivors of the availability of victim compensation. In cases where state statute or the state's victims' bill of rights indicates that victims and survivors of victims have a right to be informed but fails to designate who is responsible for informing them about victim compensation, states receive 0 points.

Language accessibility

Even when survivors are aware of the availability of victim compensation, applying for this financial relief is not always accessible. Survivors might be unable to file for victim compensation because the application is unavailable in a language they speak or in their first language. According to a 2020 report by the National Resource Center for Reaching Victims, victim service providers identified individuals with limited English proficiency and immigrants and refugees among

the top five groups with a lack of awareness of victim services.³⁷ While having application materials in one's native or predominantly spoken language does not necessarily make the program accessible, it should be the bare minimum.

The authors chose to evaluate the language accessibility of a state's victim compensation program based on the availability of application materials in languages representative of the state's population. To score a state's language accessibility, they compared data from the U.S. Census Bureau on the share of households in each state that speak a language other than English at home with the availability of applications in those languages on a state program's website.³⁸ For the evaluation, they chose to consider only languages in a state with at least 5 percent of households speaking that language at home and only awarded a point to a state if they have application materials matching all populations above this cutoff.³⁹

Language accessibility

States receive a maximum of 1 point if application materials are available on the administering agency's official website in all languages that at least 5 percent of all households in the state speak at home.

States receive 0 points if application materials are not available in at least one language spoken by more than 5 percent of the state's households.

Time limits

In most states, to qualify for victim compensation, survivors must report their harm to proper authorities—typically law enforcement—and apply for compensation within a specific time frame. These time frames range by state, but some are so short in duration that survivors can easily miss out on life-changing funds. For example, some states have reporting time limits as short as 48 hours and filing time limits as short as six months. Immediately following their victimization, survivors may not be aware of compensation programs or may lack the emotional capacity to undertake an arduous application process. One survivor, Dion Green of Dayton, Ohio, lost his father, Derrick Fudge, in a mass shooting. He was present when the shooting took place. In the memory of his father, Green founded the Flourishing Under Distress Given Encouragement (FUDGE) Foundation, helping survivors navigate their trauma and access resources.⁴⁰ He also advocates widely for gun violence prevention and victim compensation program reform.

Reflecting on the limited time allowed survivors to apply for victim compensation, he shared: “My shooting happened August 4, 2019. My trauma might not get [there] until August 4, 2024. There is no time limit on grief.”⁴¹ As Green noted, many survivors do not come to terms with the full extent of the effect of the harm caused by an incident of violence until long after the incident itself. Recognizing the nonlinear nature of grief and healing, states were graded based on the amount of time allotted to survivors to report their victimization and apply for victim compensation.

Time limits: Reporting harm to law enforcement

States receive the maximum of 2 points if there is no statutorily defined limitation on when survivors can report their victimization to proper authorities to be still eligible to receive a victim compensation award.

States receive 1 point if, in statute, victims are required to have reported their victimization to the proper authorities within a specified timeframe to be eligible to receive a victim compensation award but the state will make an exception to this requirement under a “good cause” clause or similar exception.

States receive 0 points if, in statute, victims are required to have reported their victimization to the proper authorities within a specified timeframe to be eligible to receive a victim compensation award and there is no statutorily defined waiver or exception to this rule.

States that require victims to have reported their victimization to the proper authorities within a specified timeframe to be eligible to receive a victim compensation award but also codify specific exceptions – including but not limited to being a victim of sexual assault or human trafficking and being a minor (under the age of 18) at the time of victimization – receive an additional 0.5 points.

Time limits: Applying for victim compensation

States receive a maximum of 2 points if, in statute, no limitation is placed on when victims can apply for compensation following their incident of harm to still be eligible to receive an award.

States receive 1 point if, in statute, a limitation is placed on when victims can apply for compensation following their incident of harm to still be eligible to receive an award but will make exceptions to this requirement under a “good cause” clause or similar exception.

States receive 0 points if, in statute, a limitation is placed on when victims can apply for compensation following their victimization and still be eligible to receive an award, and there is no exception made to this rule.

States that require victims to apply for a victim compensation award within a specified timeframe from the time of their harm, but also codify specific exceptions, including but not limited to being a victim of sexual assault or human trafficking and being a minor (under the age of 18) at the time of victimization, receive an additional 0.5 points.

Adequate compensation

In the aftermath of violence, survivors face a variety of expenses that, if unpaid, can compromise their housing, personal safety, healing, and more. In addition to needing immediate financial assistance for burials, medical expenses to treat life-threatening injuries, among other things, survivors of violence are more likely than their counterparts to have experienced PTSD and may require longer-term assistance for mental health counseling and trauma recovery.⁴² Understanding the tremendous and varied harms survivors face, the authors of this report evaluated states based on the types of expenses covered by victim compensation programs and the dollar amount of victim compensation available.

Eligible expenses

Throughout the focus groups, survivors reported needing financial support to bury loved ones, relocate, receive counseling services, install security systems, and more. Princess Titus lost her 16-year-old son, Anthony Titus, to gun violence in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She has since co-founded Appetite for Change, a nonprofit organization that trains youth in the food industry and provides jobs to

community members.⁴³ Titus describes her mounting needs following her son's death: "I didn't keep my job. I didn't get the mail for COBRA (the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act), so I didn't have ... health insurance anymore. So, I didn't have a therapist. I didn't have a doctor."⁴⁴ Titus also felt unsafe in her home, which she eventually lost because of financial hardship. She explains, "I wasn't safe, I should have been relocated."⁴⁵

Stories such as Titus' are all too common and point to the acute and unmet needs of countless survivors. The authors examined the types of expenses for which states will grant victim compensation to reflect this plethora of needs. Due to federal mandates, all states provide some form of coverage for burial expenses, medical bills, mental health counseling, and lost wages, so the authors did not consider these expenses for the purpose of this rubric.

While many states include some form of language that the application review board will consider expenses on a case-by-case basis, such ambiguity leaves survivors and victim service providers in the dark about what they can expect. Furthermore, as almost all awards are given to survivors through reimbursement, making explicit through statute, regulation, and publicly available documents what expenses will and will not be covered is paramount for survivors making difficult financial decisions in the aftermath of violence. Accordingly, the authors evaluated states based on the inclusion of each of the following additional areas of coverage, and only if that information is explicitly listed in statute or publicly available materials: relocation expenses, security improvements, property loss, crime scene cleanup, travel assistance to court or medical and mental health appointments, future loss of support or loss of support for dependents, legal fees, replacement services, nontraditional healing modalities, bereavement leave, and accessibility modifications. These areas of coverage can be pivotal to ensuring survivors' immediate safety and for their long-term healing journeys.

Eligible expenses

States receive 1 point for each expense category explicitly included in either state statute or another publicly available resource, such as an online brochure produced by the state administering agency.

States receive 0 points for each expense category that is not explicitly included in either state statute or a publicly available resource.

Expense categories:

- Crime scene cleanup
- Replacement for property lost, damaged as a result of harm, or confiscated for the purpose of evidence collection
- Relocation expenses
- Future economic support or loss of support for dependents
- Security improvements
- Travel
- Bereavement leave
- Nontraditional healing modalities
- Replacement services/child care
- Legal fees, including fees related to the compensation process (applications, claims, appeals, etc.)
- Accessibility modifications

Maximum allowable compensation

Unfortunately, the amount of victim compensation available to survivors is often insufficient to meet their financial needs. According to the Alliance for Safety and Justice, “Victims of violence are 3.6 times as likely to have declared bankruptcy compared to people who were not victims of violence.”⁴⁶ In 2016, Ebony Robinson of Minneapolis lost her 24-year-old son, Andre Riley Jr., to gun violence. Though she was awarded compensation, she believes she should have received more money to allow her to take the additional time off from work that she needed to grieve. She reflects: “I just struggled. I didn’t pay my bills. I didn’t even remember to even open any bills. ... I was forced to go back to work, and I wasn’t ready.”⁴⁷

Focus group participants frequently said that burial expense coverage essential to healing, was insufficient. One participant from Brooklyn, New York, Monica Cassaberry, also known as Mizz Real, lost her 22-year-old son, Jamal Singleton, to gun violence in September 2011. Though she received \$6,000, the maximum amount available for burial expenses at the time in New York, she said it was not adequate: “I had to still go out and get money to finish burying my son because \$6,000 was nowhere near enough, and I even had my son cremated. If you wanted to have your son ... put into a grave or a plot, you would have to come up with extra money.”⁴⁸ Thankfully, New York State’s burial expense cap was raised to \$12,000, effective November 5, 2025.⁴⁹

To reflect the importance of providing sufficient victim compensation, the authors graded states based on the statutorily defined maximum amount of compensation available to survivors, adjusted for the cost of living in the state based on the Bureau of Economic Analysis 2023 Regional Price Parities for States Index.⁵⁰ NORC provides the best available estimates for the average cost of harm per victim of violent crime. According to NORC's analysis, violent robbery crimes have the highest estimated per victim cost at \$58,606.⁵¹ While not every incident of harm and the corresponding expenses will necessitate this amount of compensation, nor is this compensation amount adequate for all victims of violence, the authors evaluated the maximum amount of compensation based on this threshold and similarly adjusted for the cost of living in each state.⁵² For example, in Alabama, \$58,606 is equivalent to \$52,727.82 after adjusting for the cost of living. Therefore, \$52,727.82 is the adjusted compensation limit used to evaluate Alabama for this provision. Furthermore, for states that exceed their state-adjusted threshold, the authors considered whether the maximum allowable compensation to victims is conditioned on catastrophic or permanent injury.

In addition, due to the costliness and gravity of laying a loved one to rest, the authors also evaluated states based on the maximum compensation available to survivors for burial and funeral expenses. The National Funeral Directors Association estimated the 2023 median cost of a burial with a vault in the United States to be \$9,995.⁵³ States were evaluated on the statutorily allowed maximum compensation to cover funeral and burial-related expenses based on this estimated cost, adjusted for the state's cost of living. For example, in Alaska, \$9,995 is equivalent to \$10,166.41 after adjusting for the cost of living. Therefore, \$10,166.41 is the threshold used in evaluating Alaska.

Maximum allowable compensation

States receive the maximum 2 points if the statutorily defined maximum compensation limit for all victims is equal to or above the estimated average cost of harm per victim of robbery in the state, after adjusting for cost of living.

States receive 1 point if the maximum compensation limit is equal to or above the estimated average cost of harm per victim of robbery in the state, after adjusting for cost of living, but only under the condition that the victim has suffered a "permanent" or "catastrophic" injury.

States receive 0 points if, under no condition, the statutorily defined maximum compensation limit, after adjusting for the cost of living, meets or exceeds the estimated average cost of harm per robbery victim in the state.

Maximum allowable compensation for funeral and burial expenses

States receive a maximum 1 point if, after adjusting for the cost of living, the statutorily defined maximum compensation limit for expenses related to funeral or burial services meets or exceeds the estimated 2023 median cost of burial with a vault.

States receive 0 points if the statutorily defined maximum compensation limit for expenses related to funeral or burial services is below the estimated 2023 median cost of burial with a vault, after adjusting for the cost of living.

Eligibility barriers

Several eligibility-related issues prevent survivors from receiving victim compensation. These include restrictions based on law enforcement interactions, current and historic criminal legal system involvement, citizenship requirements, and narrow understandings of who is affected in the aftermath of violence. Knowing these barriers, some survivors may not apply for compensation, while others may apply only to have their applications rejected. These restrictive policies ultimately reinforce existing inequities and penalize those at the margins.

Mandatory police reporting

In 2023, less than half of violent victimizations were reported to law enforcement.⁵⁴ Yet in most states, survivors must report their victimization to police to be eligible for victim compensation. Survivors may not report because of a variety of factors such as fear of retaliation from the person who harmed them or concern that they won't be believed. This is especially true for LGBTQIA+ survivors, immigrant survivors, and survivors of intimate partner violence.⁵⁵ In addition, due to well-documented, racially unjust policing practices and state violence against Black and brown people, many survivors of color fear that they may be further harmed if they interact with law enforcement.⁵⁶ As Clarice Robinson, a Chicago-based victims' rights researcher, shared in a focus group: "Trust is a big thing. So even if there's an officer coming ... with the best intentions, we know that there's just a history of the way that police have come into Black and brown communities, into low-income communities."⁵⁷

Even if survivors go to law enforcement, multiple focus group participants said that when they reported their victimization, police misrepresented the incident in reports. Lisa Good, the founder and CEO of Urban Grief, a community-based organization that responds in the wake of violence in New York State's Capital Region,⁵⁸ helps numerous survivors apply for victim compensation. Despite this, when Good was assaulted in 2020, she did not apply herself. She explains: "I'm the advocate, and I didn't file the claim. And the reason I did not file the claim is because when I went to the police department to get a copy of my incident report, there was no record of the incident."⁵⁹ Good elaborates that her harm was listed as "officer assistance" despite the reality of what occurred and the presence of police cars, fire trucks, and an ambulance.⁶⁰ The nature of the police report caused Good further emotional distress and led her to miss out on compensation for medical bills.

Given the discomfort many survivors have with law enforcement and the subjective, often biased nature of police reporting,⁶¹ states received points for permitting survivors to use alternative forms of evidence other than a police report to prove their victimization to receive victim compensation. Specifically, bearing in mind well-founded institutional distrust, states were graded most favorably if they permit survivors to report to entities not affiliated with the criminal legal system or a government agency, such as medical, mental health, or victim service providers.⁶²

Mandatory police reporting

States receive a maximum of 2 points if, in statute, victims are permitted to report their harm to entities not affiliated with the criminal legal system or a government agency – such as medical, mental health, or victim service providers – to demonstrate they have been a victim of violence.

States receive 1 point if, in statute, victims are required to report their harm to law enforcement to demonstrate they have been a victim of violence but provide statutory exceptions due to good cause shown.

States receive 0 points if, in statute, victims are required to report their harm to law enforcement and the state does not codify a good cause waiver to this requirement.

States that require victims and survivors of victims to report their harm to police but also codify specific exceptions – including but not limited to being a victim of sexual assault or human trafficking and being a minor (under the age of 18) at the time of victimization – receive an additional 0.5 points.

Police cooperation

Survivors' eligibility for victim compensation is often contingent on their cooperation with law enforcement. A survivor can be deemed uncooperative if they choose not to participate in police questioning because of fear or if they are not emotionally or physically capable to speak with police following their or a loved one's injury. Bevelynn Bravo of San Diego lost her son, Jaime Bravo Jr., to violence in 2012. Bravo is not only a survivor but also a victim service provider and a co-founder of Mothers with a Message, which supports at-risk youth.⁶³ She explained that noncooperation is often unintentional: "It's not that you're trying to be uncooperative. ... It's just that it's all new, you don't have anybody there representing you."⁶⁴

Echoing this sentiment, Good, in her role at Urban Grief, recalled working with a survivor of gun violence who was denied victim compensation because he was deemed uncooperative by law enforcement. She said police officers attempted to question the victim in the hospital after he had just emerged from surgery. In this environment, survivors can be vulnerable, disoriented, and even fighting for their lives. Good attempted to schedule an appointment for the survivor to meet with the officers to demonstrate his cooperativeness but noted that the officers "did not follow through."⁶⁵ Despite the survivor's willingness to speak with police, he was deemed uncooperative and thus was never compensated. Determining if an applicant is cooperative with law enforcement is subjective and vests disproportionate power in law enforcement testimony, which can be biased, leaving little recourse for survivors to appeal their denial.

Necessitating police cooperation also results in racial disparities in the provision of victim compensation. In the recent report, "Inequality in Crime Victim Compensation," Jeremy Levine, a professor at the University of Michigan, analyzed data from victim compensation claims submitted in 18 states from 2015 through 2022. He found that Black men who apply for compensation have a 7 percent probability of being denied for perceived misconduct or failure to cooperate with law enforcement. For white men, the probability of denial is only 4 percent, and for white women it is only 2.5 percent.⁶⁶ Similarly, a 2023 report by The Associated Press on racial discrimination in victim compensation programs revealed that 19 of the 23 states analyzed disproportionately denied Black applicants compared with white applicants.⁶⁷ In some states, "Black applicants were nearly twice as likely as white applicants to be denied [victim compensation]."⁶⁸ Moreover, Black applicants are almost twice as likely as white applicants to be denied victim compensation for "behavior-based" reasons, such as being uncooperative with law enforcement.⁶⁹

These findings mirror the reality that Black Americans, particularly Black men, have long been criminalized by law enforcement even when they have been harmed. As a result, Black survivors may not want to cooperate with police, fearing for their safety.⁷⁰ Victim compensation application review processes are less racially equitable when they require and unnecessarily rely upon the subjectivity of law enforcement reports regarding victim cooperation.

Police cooperation

States receive the maximum 2 points if, in statute, the state does not make eligibility to victim compensation contingent on the victim and/or applicant proving they have cooperated with law enforcement investigating their harm.

States receive 1 point if, in statute, they make eligibility contingent on the victim and/or applicant proving that they have cooperated with law enforcement, but they also codify “good cause” or “reasonableness” exceptions to waive this requirement.

States receive 0 points if, in statute, claimants are required to demonstrate they have cooperated with law enforcement to be eligible to receive an award and do not include a “good cause” exception.

States that do require cooperation with law enforcement to be eligible, but also codify any specific exceptions, including but not limited to, being a victim of sexual assault or human trafficking and being a minor (under the age of 18) at the time of victimization, receive an additional 0.5 points.

Contributory conduct

Many states also bar survivors from receiving compensation if they or the loved one lost to violence are deemed to have had a hand in the victimization, commonly known as “contributory conduct” or “contributory misconduct.” What constitutes contributory conduct can range from being labeled as a “gang member,” to allegedly instigating an altercation, to failing to avoid a confrontation, to being in possession of or under the influence of illegal drugs at the time of the incident of harm. Contributory conduct policies perpetuate the false narrative that victims and survivors must be “innocent” or “perfect” to receive support. One focus group participant, a mother from Brooklyn, New York, lost her son to gun violence and applied for victim compensation funding to pay for his funeral. At the time,

New York State provided survivors \$6,000 for burial expenses. She received a letter stating she was only eligible for \$3,000 because, according to the state's Office of Victim Services, her son contributed to his own death. She explains, "They were saying I wasn't entitled to the breadth of it ... because they say he caused his own demise."⁷¹ Notably, New York State has since amended its laws around contributory conduct considerations for homicide victims. In 2025, New York signed into law a bill that eliminated contributory conduct reductions and denials in cases that resulted in the death of a victim.⁷² Far too many survivors who have lost children to violence are unable to heal from harm because of such criminalization.

Just like police reporting and cooperation requirements, contributory conduct reductions and denials are highly subjective and deeply racially inequitable. Joan Gerhardt is the director of policy and advocacy at the New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, a nonprofit representing the voices of New York's domestic violence survivors and the advocates who support them.⁷³ She notes:

I've heard that many victim compensation claims, particularly of Black and brown families in New York's cities who have had family members murdered by gun violence, are routinely denied state assistance, even if there's no real evidence that the victim contributed to the crime that caused their injury or harm. It is critical for New York to stop assessing contributory conduct so all victims can receive the support and financial assistance they need to get back on their feet.⁷⁴

Recent research from The Associated Press sheds further light on these disparities, revealing that, in surveyed states, "Black applicants were almost three times as likely as applicants of other races to be denied for behavior-based reasons, including contributory misconduct."⁷⁵ Again, these disparities are deeply related to the historic overcriminalization and demonization of Black Americans.⁷⁶

Contributory conduct: Reduction or denial for victim

States receive the maximum of 2 points if, in statute, the state does not include provisions to deny or reduce victim compensation due to the victim's alleged conduct in the event leading up to their harm.

States receive 0.5 points if, in statute, the state includes a provision to deny or reduce a victim compensation award based on the victim's alleged conduct but waives this consideration under specified mitigating circumstances, including but not limited to being a victim of sexual assault or human trafficking and being a minor (under the age of 18) at the time of victimization.

States receive 0 points for this category if, in statute, the state includes a provision to deny or reduce a victim compensation award based on the victim's alleged conduct and does not codify any waivers under specified mitigating circumstances.

Contributory conduct: Reduction or denial for survivors of victim

State receives the maximum of 1 point if, in statute, in cases of applications made by survivors of victims, the conduct of the victim is not considered. Points are awarded if this is the case for any compensation. For example, a state may choose not to consider contributory conduct in cases where survivors of victims apply for burial or counseling expenses. States that do not include provisions to deny or reduce victim compensation based on contributory conduct also receive 1 point for this category.

States receive 0 points if, in statute, no exceptions are made for survivors of victims when considering contributory conduct of the victim.

Contributory conduct: Consideration of gang affiliation

States receive the maximum of 1 point if, in statute, gang affiliation or association is not mentioned as a factor for consideration in the approval, denial, or reduction of victim compensation. States that do not include provisions to deny or reduce victim compensation based on contributory conduct also receive 1 point for this category.

States receive 0 points for this category if, in statute or regulations, a victim or claimant's association or affiliation with a gang can be considered in the approval, denial, or reduction of their victim compensation award.

Contributory conduct: Consideration of illicit drug or alcohol involvement or use

States receive 1 point if, in statute or regulations, involvement with or use of illicit drugs is not mentioned as a potential factor in the approval, denial, or reduction of victim compensation. States which do not include provisions to deny or reduce victim compensation based on contributory conduct also receive 1 point for this category.

States receive 0 points for this category if, in statute or regulations, a victim or claimant's involvement with or use of illicit drugs can be considered in the approval, denial, or reduction of their victim compensation award.

Conviction and incarceration status and history

In many states, survivors of violence can be denied victim compensation because of their conviction histories. This practice can leave nearly one-third of all adults ineligible to receive victim compensation.⁷⁷ Having a conviction history does not prevent someone from becoming a victim of violence, nor does it make someone less deserving of support. Furthermore, such restrictions reflect the racial disparities that characterize policing and incarceration in the United States.⁷⁸ In his aforementioned research, Jeremy Levine of the University of Michigan found that in Florida, a state that denies compensation awards based on victims and survivors' conviction histories, "16% of all Black men who apply for victim compensation in Florida—1 out of every 6 claims—are automatically denied based on their criminal records."⁷⁹ People with conviction histories often already struggle financially due to time spent out of the workforce, employment barriers, and housing restrictions.⁸⁰ Denying them access to victim compensation exacerbates those difficulties.

In 2019, Dion Green was en route to his father's funeral when he learned his application for victim compensation had been denied⁸¹ because although his father had been killed in a mass shooting, he had a drug-related felony conviction in 2011.⁸² Green has since worked to pass much-needed legislation to address this issue in Ohio. In 2022, thanks partly to Green's advocacy, Ohio passed a bill⁸³ prohibiting barring victims and survivors from receiving compensation based on conviction histories.⁸⁴ Having a conviction history did not preclude Dion's father, Derrick Fudge, from experiencing victimization, nor did it prevent Dion from needing assistance. As Danielle Sered, executive director of Common Justice, noted in her report, "Accounting for Violence: How to Increase Safety and Break Our Failed Reliance on Mass Incarceration":

*Many survivors of violence have complex lives, imperfect histories, and even criminal convictions. But just as it would be wrong to excuse people's actions simply because they were previously victimized, it is also wrong to ignore someone's victimization because the person previously broke a law or committed harm in the past.*⁸⁵

Similarly, some states deny or reduce an applicant's victim compensation award if they have outstanding fines and fees associated with criminal legal system involvement. Such restrictions punish the punished. As a payer of last resort, victim compensation programs inherently are designed to provide critical support to

survivors facing extraordinary financial hardship. Barring individuals seeking critical financial aid because they were already facing economic hardship before their victimization serves to only further disenfranchise those individuals and exacerbate the harm that they experienced.

In addition, some states deny applications based on whether the incident of harm occurred whilst someone was incarcerated. While states are legally responsible for meeting the medical needs of those who are incarcerated, given the Eighth Amendment's prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment, incarcerated people are still charged copays.⁸⁶ In addition, the physical and emotional trauma associated with victimization may extend far beyond an individual's release and necessitate their continued care, especially given the poor quality of health care in prisons and jails.⁸⁷ Other states bar people from applying for victim compensation due to their incarceration, regardless of when or where their or a loved one's victimization occurred. Someone who is incarcerated and loses a loved one may have depended on that person for financial support or be financially responsible for their burial. Denying incarcerated people compensation further exacerbates cycles of trauma and disenfranchisement, which victim compensation programs are intended to interrupt so healing processes can begin. Incarcerated people deserve access to victim compensation as much as anyone who experiences violence.

Conviction status or history

States receive the maximum of 2 points if, in statute, there is either: 1) no explicit language that bars a victim or claimant from applying for or receiving a victim compensation award; or 2) an explicit inclusion that claimants cannot be denied compensation or have their compensation reduced based on the applicant's or victim's arrest or conviction history (pre- or post-victimization, probation or parole status, or due to outstanding fines and fees).

States receive 0.5 points if, in statute, claimants can be denied compensation based on the victim's arrest or conviction history, but the state also codifies specific waivers to this rule under mitigating circumstances, including but not limited to being a victim of sexual assault or human trafficking and being a minor (under the age of 18) at the time of victimization.

States receive 0 points if, in statute, a claimant can be denied compensation or have their compensation reduced based on the applicant's or victim's arrest or conviction history and the state does not codify exceptions to this rule.

Incarceration status or history

State receives the maximum of 2 points if, in statute, there is either: 1) no explicit language that a victim or claimant currently incarcerated is barred from applying for or receiving a victim compensation award; or 2) there is a specific inclusion that a claimant cannot be denied compensation based on their incarceration status or if the harm on which the claim is based occurred while the victim was incarcerated.

States receive 0.5 points if, in statute, the state codifies specific waivers to this rule under mitigating circumstances, including but not limited to being a victim of sexual assault or human trafficking and being a minor (under the age of 18) at the time of victimization.

States receive 0 points for this category if, in statute or regulations, a claimant can be denied or receive reduced victim compensation based on being incarcerated or if the harm on which the claim is based occurred while the victim was incarcerated.

Eligibility for survivors of victims

Focus group participants frequently underscored how the effects of violence and loss can reverberate among friends and extended family. However, many victim compensation programs limit who can access financial relief based on their relationship to a victim or a survivor. Aaliyah Strong of Atlanta lost her fiancé, Ty Ross, to gun violence in 2022. He was only 28 years old. Strong founded the nonprofit organization, Tyme to Thrive, in Ross' memory, which provides "financial and emotional support services to families who have lost a loved one to gun violence."⁸⁸ Strong was denied victim compensation for burial expenses, rental assistance, and grief counseling because she and Ross, although engaged, were not married at the time of his death. She was further deemed ineligible as a witness to violence because she did not "physically see him get shot."⁸⁹ This is despite the fact that the shooting occurred at their shared workplace and, as she recounts, she was "holding his bullet wounds and waiting for EMS (emergency medical services) to get there."⁹⁰ Strong's heartbreaking story represents the failure of some victim compensation programs to recognize the impact of violence on victim's loved ones, as well as the immense trauma experienced by witnesses.

Eligibility for survivors of victims: Relationship definition

States receive the maximum of 2 points if, in statute, applicants with a relationship to the victim beyond shared household, legal status, or by blood are eligible for compensation.

States receive 1 point if, in statute, household members – regardless of blood or legal relationship – are eligible for victim compensation, but the state does not consider relationships beyond household members.

States receive 0 points if, in statute, the state only considers relationships defined by blood or legal status.

Eligibility for survivors of victims: Witnesses

States receive the maximum of 1 point if, in statute, the state stipulates that all witnesses to harm are eligible to receive victim compensation.

States receive 0.5 points if, in statute, the state only makes those who were under the age of 18 when they witnessed harm eligible to receive victim compensation.

States receive 0 points if, in statute, the state does not make witnesses to harm eligible to apply for victim compensation.

Eligibility for survivors of victims: Willing or obligated to pay

States receive a maximum of 1 point if, in statute, the state codifies that a person who willingly paid for or was obligated to pay for expenses related to a victim's harm is eligible for compensation.

States receive 0 points if, in statute, the state does not codify that a person who willingly paid for or was obligated to pay for expenses related to a victim's harm is eligible for compensation.

Experience with the process

As reported by focus group participants across states, to apply for victim compensation, survivors must submit substantial amounts of paperwork and documentation to determine eligibility and qualified expenses. In addition, survivors can wait for periods ranging from weeks to months to be approved for a victim

compensation award. This process can be exhausting and, ultimately, retraumatizing. While the scope of this project does not allow for the evaluation of the specific ease or difficulty of each state's application process, the authors evaluated states based on the time taken to issue application decisions, the availability and amount of emergency awards, and the incorporation of the perspectives of individuals who are or support those who are directly impacted by violence in their process.

Emergency awards

Most states use a reimbursement model to distribute victim compensation. This means that survivors must pay out of pocket for allowable services and submit documentation before they receive payment. Many survivors simply do not have the money to pay for services up front. For example, survivors may not be able to pay out of pocket for something as costly as relocation, which can be crucial to ensuring their safety, without the support of victim compensation. Even if survivors do have the financial means, the process of submitting receipts and awaiting payment can ultimately delay the healing process. As Chicago-based advocate and researcher Clarice Robinson, said, "Many of the people most impacted by the issues, people of color, people living day to day ... they cannot wait two years to be reimbursed for something that never should have happened in the first place."⁹¹ Many states have codified emergency award policies that permit rapid disbursement of funds for specific needs such as burial and relocation expenses. Given that emergency awards can be key to alleviating survivors' immediate financial stress, states were evaluated based on their inclusion of an emergency award provision and the amount that can be provided to survivors through such an emergency award. Thirty-six states and Washington, D.C., establish a process through statute to award victims an emergency award. Of those, 24 states and Washington, D.C., have established a limit below the maximum compensation allowable for how much can be given to a victim through such an emergency award. From those 25 programs that establish an emergency award provision and place a limit on how much can be awarded, the authors calculated the average and distribution of award limits. The average emergency award limit is \$3,146.15. However, to hold states to a higher standard, and to recognize the significant and immediate financial needs which can occur following violence, the authors use the 75th percentile (\$3,750) as the benchmark for evaluating state policy.

Emergency awards

States receive a maximum of 2 points if, in statute, the state codifies a process to determine which victim compensation applicants can receive an emergency, tentative, or expedited award to alleviate financial hardship, and the established limit for such an emergency award is equal to or above \$3,750, after adjusting for the cost of living.

States receive 1 point if, in statute, the state codifies an emergency award process, but the established limit for such an award is below \$3,750, after adjusting for the cost of living.

States receive 0 points if there is no codified process in statute for victim compensation applicants to receive an emergency award.

Inclusion of victim, provider, and advocate perspectives

Most focus group participants described feeling unsupported through the victim compensation application process. They said victim compensation programs should be more trauma informed, more compassionate, and learn from survivors' experiences. Michelle Monterrosa lost her 22-year-old brother, Sean Monterrosa, to police violence in Vallejo, California, in 2020.⁹² She has advocated tirelessly for an end to police violence against Black and brown communities ever since.⁹³ Together with her sister, Ashley Monterrosa, she founded The Sean Monterrosa Project, “a movement for justice, accountability, and community empowerment.”⁹⁴ She believes there must be structures in place to ensure that every victim and survivor “is met with dignity and support and integrity.”⁹⁵ To achieve this, Monterrosa said, “Victim compensation folks need to reflect our communities, they need to also understand the experiences that we all go through.” Monterrosa’s insights point to the need for victim compensation programs to not only include survivors of violence in program design, but to also be representative of communities of color, which are the most affected by violence.

While program designs vary, several states incorporate survivors, advocates, or providers into their decision-making processes or in an advisory capacity. The authors awarded additional points to those states that do so.

Inclusion of victim, provider, and/or advocate perspectives

States receive the maximum of 2 points if, in statute or regulations, the states requires at least one survivor to be included in the application review process or in advisory capacity to the review board.

States receive 1 point for this category if, in statute or regulations, the state requires at least one person with direct experience supporting survivors be included in the application review process or in an advisory capacity.

States without this requirement receive 0 points.

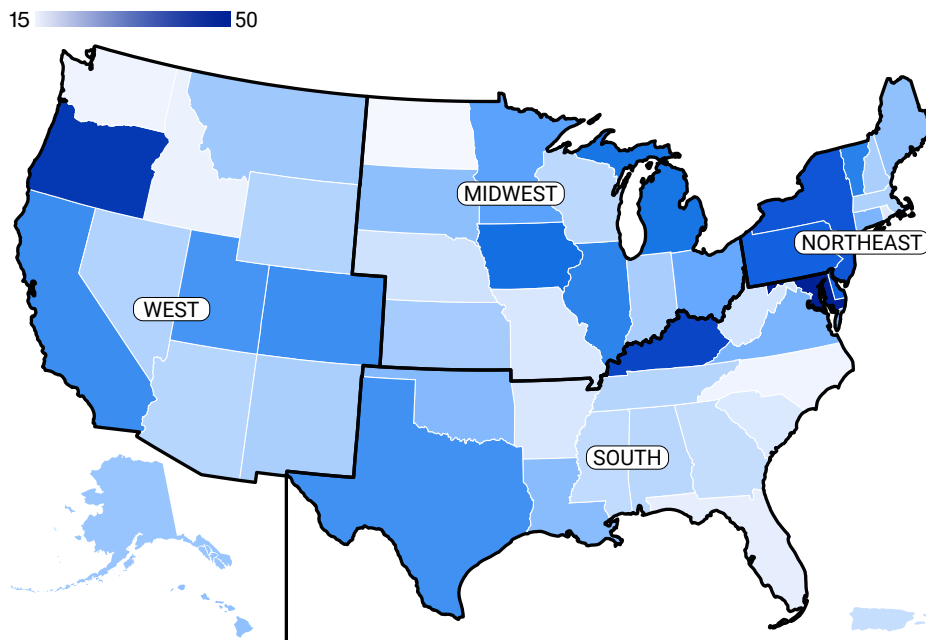
Results

Across all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and Washington, D.C., the median weighted cumulative score from this evaluation was 26.56 out of a possible 57.25 points across the four categories—awareness and accessibility, adequate compensation, eligibility barriers, and experience with the process. Only 22 of the 52 state programs included in the evaluation received equal to or more than half of the total possible points awarded. Overall, the highest scoring state was Maryland, which received a total of 46.9 points, 81.9 percent of the total possible. Idaho scored the lowest in the evaluation, receiving 14.8 points, 25.9 percent of the total possible.

FIGURE 3

All four regions of the United States contain a top 10 state in scoring, according to the State Victim Compensation Statute Rubric

Weighted cumulative state and territory scores



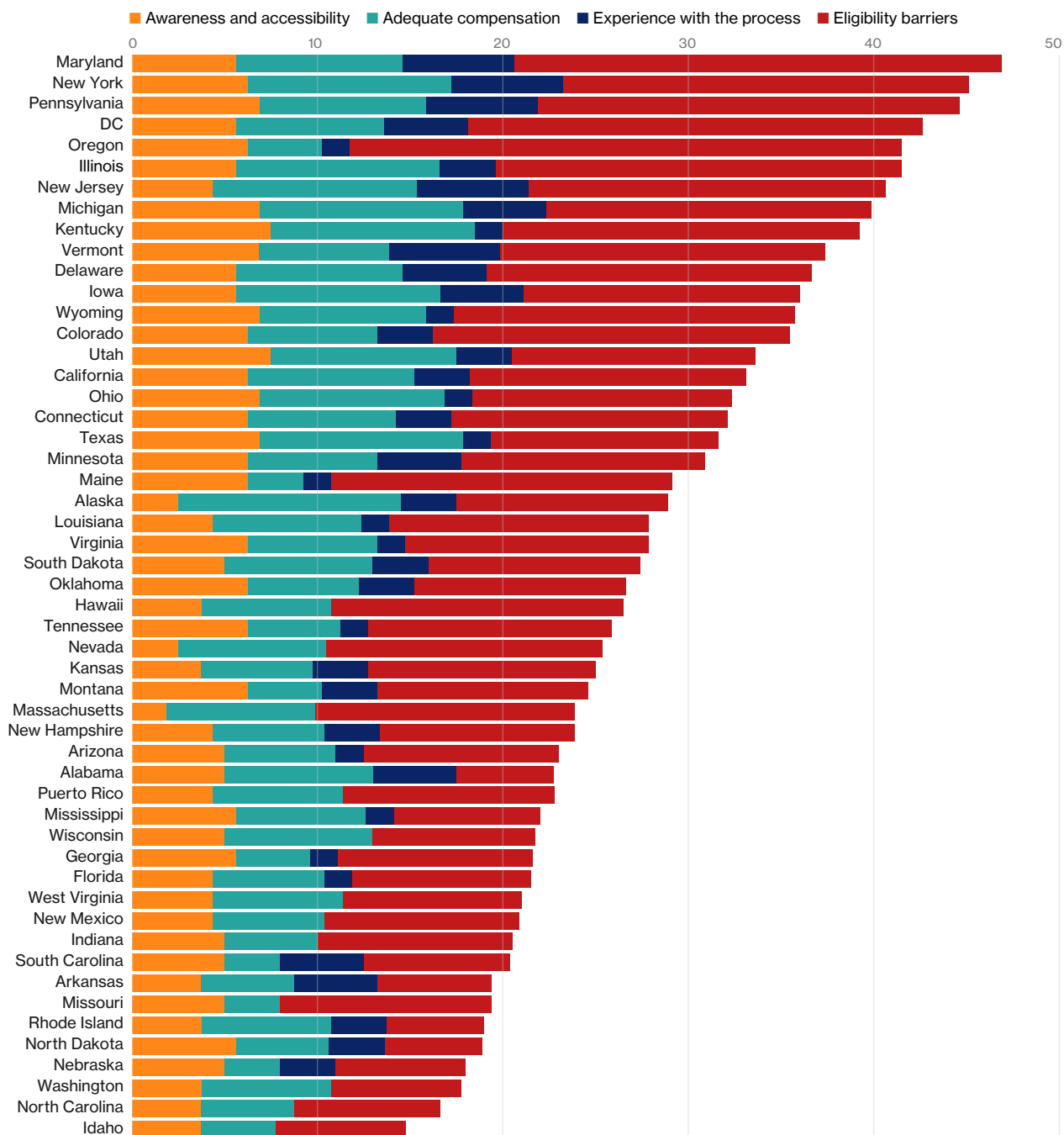
Notes: Each category score was weighted based on focus group input. The category of “eligibility barriers” was multiplied by a weight of 1.75, “experience with the process” was multiplied by a weight of 1.5, “awareness and accessibility” was multiplied by a weight of 1.25, and “adequate compensation” was multiplied by a weight of 1. (See Methodology) The four U.S. regions—Northeast, Midwest, South, and West—are based on categorization by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Source: Original analysis and evaluation of state statutes conducted by CAP and Common Justice. Alice Hamblett and Chandler Hall, “[Hope After Harm: An Evaluation of State Victim Compensation Statutes](#)” (Washington: Common Justice and Center for American Progress, 2025).

FIGURE 4

While no state earned a perfect score, Maryland came the closest, receiving 84.7 percent of total possible weighted points

Breakdown of state and territory evaluations based on the State Victim Compensation Statute Rubric, by weighted category



***Correction, September 2, 2025:** This figure has been updated to display the correct score for Illinois for the category of "Eligibility barriers."

Note: Each category score was weighted based on focus group input. The category of "eligibility barriers" was multiplied by a weight of 1.75, "experience with the process" was multiplied by a weight of 1.5, "awareness and accessibility" was multiplied by a weight of 1.25, and "adequate compensation" was multiplied by a weight of 1. (See Methodology).

Source: Original analysis and evaluation of state statutes conducted by CAP and Common Justice. Alice Hamblett and Chandler Hall, "Hope After Harm: An Evaluation of State Victim Compensation Statutes" (Washington: Common Justice and Center for American Progress, 2025).

The weighted median score for each scoring category was 5.63 points out of a possible 7.5 points for “awareness and accessibility,” 7 out of a possible 14 points for “adequate compensation,” 12.69 out of a possible 29.75 points for “eligibility barriers,” and 3 out of a possible 6 points for “experience with the process.” Kentucky and Utah received the highest weighted score for “awareness and accessibility,” both receiving perfect scores of 7.5 points. Alaska received the highest weighted score for “adequate compensation,” receiving 12 out of a possible 14 points. Oregon received the highest weighted score for eligibility barriers, receiving a perfect score of 29.75 points. Finally, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Vermont all received the highest weighed score for “experience with the process,” receiving perfect scores of 6 points. Notably, 12 states received 0 points for “experience with the process.”

This analysis makes clear that no state’s statute provides a perfect model for victim compensation, as scored based on this rubric. In addition, it is more common for states to simultaneously address longstanding inequities in some areas of their statutory code while upholding disparities in others. As Table 2 shows, seven states—Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, New Jersey, Texas, and Vermont—each scored in the top five among states for 2 of the 4 categories evaluated, and only New York and Pennsylvania scored in the top five for three categories. However, no state scored in the top five for all four categories. Oregon, which received the second highest weighted score overall, is among the bottom 10 states scored for “adequate compensation.” Alaska, with the highest score under “adequate compensation,” also had the second lowest score among states under “awareness and accessibility.” This further highlights the complexity of the state victim compensation statutory landscape and that all states have room for improvement.

TABLE 2

No state ranked in the top five across in more than two categories evaluated

Weighted state and territory scores by category

State	Awareness and accessibility	Adequate compensation	Eligibility barriers	Experience with the process	Cumulative score
Alabama	5	8	5.25	4.5	22.75
Alaska	2.5	12	11.375	3	28.875
Arizona	5	6	10.5	1.5	23
Arkansas	3.75	5	6.125	4.5	19.375
California	6.25	9	14.875	3	33.125
Colorado	6.25	7	19.25	3	35.5
Connecticut	6.25	8	14.875	3	32.125
Delaware	5.625	9	17.5	4.5	36.625
DC	5.625	8	24.5	4.5	42.625
Georgia	5.625	4	10.5	1.5	21.625
Florida	4.375	6	9.625	1.5	21.5
Hawaii	3.75	7	15.75	0	26.5
Idaho	3.75	4	7	0	14.75
Illinois	5.625	11	21.88	3	41.5
Indiana	5	5	10.5	0	20.5
Iowa	5.625	11	14.875	4.5	36
Kansas	3.75	6	12.25	3	25
Kentucky	7.5	11	19.25	1.5	39.25
Louisiana	4.375	8	14	1.5	27.875
Maine	6.25	3	18.375	1.5	29.125
Maryland	5.625	9	26.25	6	46.875
Massachusetts	1.875	8	14	0	23.875
Michigan	6.875	11	17.5	4.5	39.875
Minnesota	6.25	7	13.125	4.5	30.875
Mississippi	5.625	7	7.875	1.5	22
Missouri	5	3	11.375	0	19.375
Montana	6.25	4	11.375	3	24.625
Nebraska	5	3	7	3	18
Nevada	2.5	8	14.875	0	25.375
New Hampshire	4.375	6	10.5	3	23.875
New Jersey	4.375	11	19.25	6	40.625
New Mexico	4.375	6	10.5	0	20.875
New York	6.25	11	21.875	6	45.125
North Carolina	3.75	5	7.875	0	16.625

continues

State	Awareness and accessibility	Adequate compensation	Eligibility barriers	Experience with the process	Cumulative score
North Dakota	5.625	5	5.25	3	18.875
Ohio	6.875	10	14	1.5	32.375
Oklahoma	6.25	6	11.375	3	26.625
Oregon	6.25	4	29.75	1.5	41.5
Pennsylvania	6.875	9	22.75	6	44.625
Puerto Rico	4.375	7	11.375	0	22.75
Rhode Island	3.75	7	5.25	3	19
South Carolina	5	3	7.875	4.5	20.375
South Dakota	5	8	11.375	3	27.375
Tennessee	6.25	5	13.125	1.5	25.875
Texas	6.875	11	12.25	1.5	31.625
Utah	7.5	10	13.125	3	33.625
Vermont	6.875	7	17.5	6	37.375
Virginia	6.25	7	13.125	1.5	27.875
Washington	3.75	7	7	0	17.75
Wisconsin	5	8	8.75	0	21.75
West Virginia	4.375	7	9.625	0	21
Wyoming	6.875	9	18.375	1.5	35.75

Source: Original analysis and evaluation of state statutes conducted by CAP and Common Justice. Alice Hamblett and Chandler Hall, "[Hope After Harm: An Evaluation of State Victim Compensation Statutes](#)" (Washington: Common Justice and Center for American Progress, 2025).

Still there is reason for optimism that progress can be, and indeed, has already been made to improve access to victim compensation. Recent reforms to expand eligibility for survivors, increase compensation, and ensure more sustainable funding have taken place across the country—in California, Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, and Ohio, to name a few.⁹⁶ This is consistent with the finding that all four regions of the United States, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau,⁹⁷ are represented by a top 10 state according to the rubric, demonstrating that aspects of a strong victim compensation program can be found nationwide. States across the country, in hosting and reforming victim compensation programs, clearly embrace this universal value: Victims and survivors deserve support in the healing process.

Individual state score breakdowns can be found in the accompanying state fact sheets. Below are notable summary statistics for each scoring category.



Read the scoring breakdowns:

[Executive Summary: Hope After Harm](#)

Awareness and accessibility

Forty-seven states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico include a statute that sets a time limit for victims and survivors to apply for victim compensation following their victimization to be eligible for compensation. Colorado, Kentucky, and Utah have removed this requirement all together. Of the states that establish an application window, time limits range from six months (Indiana, South Carolina) to 84 months (California). The median application time limit is 24 months.

Similarly, 33 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico include in statute a time limit for victims and survivors of victims to report the incident of harm to law enforcement to be eligible for victim compensation. In many of these states, this time limit requirement can be waived if “good cause” is shown. Of the states that establish a reporting window, the limits range from 48 hours in Maryland and South Carolina to one year in Washington, with a median reporting window of 96 hours. Seventeen states have no such time limit requirement or do not require survivors to report their victimization directly to law enforcement.

Adequate compensation

Apart from New York, which does not cap medical expenses, all states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico establish limits on the amount of victim compensation a claimant can receive after full consideration of their application. After adjusting for a state’s cost of living,⁹⁸ unconditional compensation limits range from \$9,207 in Hawaii (\$10,000 before the cost-of-living adjustment) to \$175,015.20 in Washington state (\$190,000 before the cost-of-living adjustment), with a median of \$27,344.82 after adjusting for cost of living. Twenty states expand their compensation cap if the claimant suffered a catastrophic or permanent injury. While this statutory clause places additional burden on survivors to prove that their injuries or suffering is “catastrophic,” these clauses do allow certain survivors to be eligible for greater compensation. When these expanded compensation caps are used for their respective states, the median compensation cap, after adjusting for the cost of living, is still only \$34,739.80. For context, a 2024 study by NORC estimates that the average cost to a victim of violent crime is \$58,606 for a robbery and \$49,491 for an aggravated assault.⁹⁹ Even when catastrophic injuries are considered, this means that only 11 states—including New York—have compensation caps at or above the average cost for a victim of a robbery after adjusting for the cost of living.

Similarly, every state's program except for Colorado's sets in statute the maximum award amount that a violence victim's survivor can be awarded or reimbursed to pay for funeral or burial expenses. Only 13 states have a statutory limit set above the national median cost of a funeral after adjusting for the cost of living.

Eligibility barriers

As discussed, entangling eligibility for victim compensation awards with law enforcement and the criminal legal system disproportionately affects Black and brown survivors and their communities. States that mandate that claimants must report their incident of harm to police and subsequently prove their cooperation with law enforcement are underserving these populations who are often at the highest risk of victimization.¹⁰⁰

For a claimant to be considered eligible for victim compensation, 44 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico require a survivor report their or their loved one's harm to an entity within the criminal legal system. Six states—Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, New Mexico, and Oregon—have removed this requirement completely or allow a claimant, under all circumstances, to be eligible to receive a victim compensation award by reporting their victimization to an entity not within the criminal-legal system, such as a medical provider or victim services provider. Of the 46 programs which require the incident of harm to be reported to law enforcement or a criminal-legal system entity, 18 states and Washington, D.C., include in statute a provision to waive this requirement if “good cause” is shown or under special circumstances such as cases involving human trafficking. Twenty-six states and Puerto Rico require victimization to be reported to law enforcement have no such clause or possibility of waiver of this requirement.

Forty-four states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico require claimants to cooperate with law enforcement's investigation into their or their loved one's harm to be eligible for victim compensation. Most programs (30) that require cooperation with law enforcement in some form to be eligible for a victim compensation award also include a statute provision to waive this requirement if “good cause” is shown or under special circumstances. However, 16 states have no such clause or possibility of waiver of this requirement.

Experience with the process

Providing emergency awards to survivors who are unable to pay for the immediate costs related to their harm can be essential to their safety, care, and healing. Thirty-six states and Washington, D.C., include a statute that grants survivors an emergency award, typically requiring reviewers to find that a claimant will experience substantial financial hardship if not granted emergency assistance. Of the 37 programs that include an emergency award provision, 24 states and the Washington, D.C., have statutes that set limits on how much a claimant can be granted under an emergency award under the maximum allowable cap. These limits range from \$300 in Minnesota to \$10,000 in Maryland, with a median award limit of \$1,000. Twelve state programs do not, by statute, establish a separate limit on emergency awards.

Methodology limitations

The landscape of victim compensation programs—as well as their administration, funding, and opportunity for reform—is vast. The scope of this project is comparatively limited. As such, the authors recognize several methodological and subject matter limitations.

Methodological limitations

The authors recognize that states’ practices, which may expand upon written policy, are not necessarily included in statutes, regulations, or on their websites. However, this report focuses on information that is publicly available to those seeking access to or supporting someone seeking access to victim compensation. Every effort was made to reduce error by conducting multiple statutory reviews and by conferring on correct statutory interpretation. In addition, given the nature of document analysis as a method, error and bias is still possible. To mitigate against potential bias, as described under “Outreach to state victim compensation administrators,” the authors of this project provided administrators of all 52 programs evaluated the chance to review their state’s evaluation and offer feedback before the results were finalized. Victim compensation reform is an ongoing area of study for both CAP and Common Justice, and therefore the authors welcome feedback and engagement from key stakeholders and administrators to inform future research.

Focus group participants provided rich insights into victim compensation programs in 13 states. As previously stated, most survivor participants who had lost a loved one to violence identified as Black or African American women. The provider and advocate focus groups were limited to six participants, all of whom were women working in a total of only four states. The focus groups were also limited to English speakers and those with access to technology that enabled them to participate via video or telephone call. Though focus groups were scheduled on both weekdays and weekends and at varying times, it is possible that some potential participants did not attend due to scheduling conflicts. The authors recognize that

the focus groups do not reflect the entirety of experiences of survivors, providers, and advocates across the country. Despite these limitations, the authors believe the participants represented a range of viewpoints and experiences, and that their insights about the opportunities and challenges interacting with their CVC program mirrors what has been documented in existing research. Accordingly, the data gleaned from the focus groups was incorporated into the rubric weighting and policy recommendations.

Subject matter limitations

The authors conducted document analysis of statutes, regulations, and other publicly available documents to understand victim compensation programs from an external perspective. Put another way, the aim was to understand what survivors, providers, and advocates encounter when they attempt to file or support someone filing for victim compensation. Given this focus, as well as organizational capacity, the authors chose not to engage victim compensation program administrators in focus groups. However, the authors conducted email outreach to each state's victim compensation program, hosted information sessions to make them aware of this project, and provided them with an opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback on their state's evaluation. (see "Outreach to state victim compensation administrators"). The authors greatly respect the work of administrators and the invaluable perspective that they can provide on the opportunities and challenges facing victim compensation programs. Additionally, it is acknowledged that funding levels and state laws can often limit the scope of victim compensation programs. To gain a greater understanding of the compensation program landscape, please read the 2024 report by the Urban Institute and the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, "Twenty Years Later: National Study of Victim Compensation Program Trends, Challenges, and Successes."¹⁰¹

This project also does not address the issue of funding state victim compensation programs. In 1984, Congress passed the VOCA, establishing the national CVF.¹⁰² The CVF consists of non-taxpayer dollars from fines and fees associated with federal prosecutions and partially funds victim compensation programs through a formula grant program, matching 75 percent of states' annual victim compensation spending.¹⁰³ In recent years, concerns have mounted regarding the health and stability of the federal CVF,¹⁰⁴ prompting the introduction of the National Crime Victims Fund Stabilization Act of 2024.¹⁰⁵ The authors share these concerns and recognize that plentiful, consistent funding from states and the federal government is essential to the rigor and longevity of victim compensation programs.



See more:

[Twenty Years Later: National Study of Victim Compensation Program Trends, Challenges, and Successes](#)

Beyond pursuing additional funding support from the federal government, states have historically supplemented annual CVF funding through the collection of criminal fines and fees.¹⁰⁶ States' overreliance on this funding source threatens the sustainability of victim compensation, as it has already with the federal CVF. Furthermore, reliance on fines and fees can exacerbate existing economic inequity, particularly for Black and brown communities, who are overpoliced and overincarcerated.¹⁰⁷ Unlike the federal CVF, which is primarily funded by fines and fees from "white-collar" crimes, criminal fines and fees at the state level are disproportionately levied on the same population that is most in need of victim compensation, yet also the least likely to receive it.¹⁰⁸ In response, some states have begun to utilize general or other funding streams to underwrite victim compensation programs.¹⁰⁹ While examining these reforms is beyond the scope of this project, the authors applaud their efforts.

This project exists within and is informed by a broader landscape of historical and contemporary victim compensation reforms. While this report and the accompanying state fact sheets highlight recent legislative achievements, this project does not comprehensively address efforts made across the country to improve victim compensation statutes. This work, led by community-based organizations, legislators, and survivors, has been and will continue to be crucial to ensuring state statutes promote equity, accessibility, and healing for all. CAP and Common Justice acknowledge and commend this work, especially the advocacy that survivors have undertaken in the wake of their losses. For further details regarding recent legislative changes, the authors recommend the 2023 report by the Alliance for Safety and Justice, "Healing from Harm: Expanding Access to Victim Compensation An inventory of state legislative changes to victim compensation programs, 2020-2022."¹¹⁰ Readers of this report should explore existing literature and advocacy work and, as ever, listen to and amplify the voices of survivors.¹¹¹

Recommendations

To improve the delivery of victim compensation, the authors propose five key recommendations for statutory and programmatic reform along with a series of corresponding model policies to support states in reforming their statutes. These five recommendations and corresponding model policies are based upon existing research, the expertise of focus group participants, and reforms already made by states.

States should do the following through additional legislative and administrative actions:

1. Raise awareness and increase outreach about victim compensation programs and what they entail, particularly in Black and brown communities that disproportionately experience victimization. Track awareness and outreach efforts.
2. Make the application processes less arduous and more trauma informed by reducing the required paperwork, expanding application windows, and offering substantive support to survivors.
3. Reduce law enforcement's role in determining victim compensation eligibility and award amounts.
4. Move away from reimbursement-based models and increase the amount of compensation available for burial expenses.
5. Listen to survivors.

Raise awareness and increase outreach

When the investigators (police) are investigating a crime, they knock on your door and ask questions. ... So then, if somebody's helping me get that type of support or wants to see [me] continue to be well after the crime, then they can knock on my door. They could talk to me. They could leave me a card like the investigators left a card.¹¹²

— Princess Titus

State programs must dedicate time and resources to raising awareness about the availability of victim compensation funds, particularly in communities that are most affected by violence.

Effectively informing the public about victim compensation programs requires making explicit to survivors what expenses are covered by programs. Several focus group participants reported that because they learned about victim compensation through funeral homes, they were completely unaware that they could receive money for needs beyond burial benefits, including counseling, medical bills, and relocation expenses. Simply notifying survivors of the program's existence is insufficient and a missed opportunity to address their pressing needs and provide life-changing relief.

At a minimum, mandating that law enforcement officers inform survivors of the availability of victim compensation should be codified in statute. Responding law enforcement officers should receive regular training on CVC availability, the application process, and which victim advocates or service providers are in the area for victims to connect with for additional support. However, given that law enforcement interactions with survivors can be both brief and tenuous, state programs should expand their training offerings to include other stakeholders who most frequently interact with survivors of violence, including medical personnel and funeral directors. By doing so, programs can ensure that these key actors are well prepared to inform survivors of the availability, coverage, and requirements of compensation in their state and are up to date on changes to programs.¹¹³ In keeping with suggestions from focus group participants, victim compensation programs, along with other service providers, should increase proactive outreach to survivors. Those tasked with spreading awareness about victim compensation should prioritize building trust and relationships via on-the-ground outreach. This is especially important in Black and brown communities, which are simultaneously disproportionately impacted by violence and underresourced.¹¹⁴

Increasing public awareness is best performed in partnership with local victim service providers and advocates, and therefore, state CVC programs should play a more active role in supporting this outreach and promoting accountability. In the annual performance measure report to the OVC, states are asked to detail the public outreach efforts they have taken to improve public awareness of victim compensation.¹¹⁵ Many states report offering training to victim service advocates or VOCA assistance sub-grantee recipients. While indeed crucial to ensuring direct victim service providers stay informed, trainings alone do not ensure public awareness. State CVC programs should incorporate opportunities and make space for providers to review or share best practices for outreach in these same convenings. Likewise, CVC programs should regularly evaluate the effectiveness of these trainings, both in terms of how participants conduct community-level surveys to assess the level of awareness and how they report the outcomes of these surveys.

In addition, most state administering agencies cite the need for improved data collection to “achieve and sustain effective outreach, training, and communication.”¹¹⁶ For this reason, state programs should begin to collect and analyze data not only on which program providers or sub-grantees are attending state-provided trainings, but also on the populations they are serving, the geographic areas being covered, and the efforts providers are taking to increase local community awareness. Completing a victims’ needs assessment and gap analysis is another way states can ensure programs are maximizing efforts to reach and serve victims. A needs assessment and gap analysis gather data from various stakeholders, including victim services providers and public health officials, to identify what services are most needed and where, as well as to map existing community assets that can fill those gaps.¹¹⁷ Where possible, state programs should leverage VOCA Victim Assistance Grant funding to conduct this needs assessment and gap analysis for victims, informing future decisions on where and how to direct outreach efforts.

Make the application processes less arduous and more trauma informed

I checked out for almost a whole year. I kept telling myself, ‘He’s on vacation.’ ... I just kept wanting him to come back home and looking at the door hoping he would walk through, but he’s not going to come home. I had to come to that realization, and I had to get myself together.¹¹⁸

— Mulkina Coates

Although challenging to capture via document analysis of states' statutes and regulations, the bureaucratic nature of the victim compensation application process can be both deterring and retraumatizing. Many survivors struggle to simply get out of bed each morning and do not apply for victim compensation because the application process can be complicated and daunting. State programs must streamline their application processes and lessen the amount of paperwork required of survivors. As intended, the model policies recommended in this report can address this issue legislatively. For example, removing sections on contributory conduct and cooperation with law enforcement can reduce the time it takes administrators to review applications by freeing them from the difficult task of completing forensic analysis of police reports or related documents in order to determine if an award should be denied or reduced accordingly.

For states that do not currently use an online portal that allows victims or victim service providers to submit a claim, digitization should be an immediate priority. For survivors having a difficult time leaving their homes in the aftermath of a violent incident or who, because of injury, have reduced mobility, the option to complete the application process from home is a must—although access to internet service in and of itself can also be a barrier. Likewise, digitization will lessen the burdens faced by providers who support survivors in filling out and submitting applications for compensation. As reported by focus group participants, it is essential to address provider fatigue, given that successfully navigating the victim compensation application process without assistance is virtually impossible.

In conjunction with simplifying the application process, states should foster a culture of trauma-informed communication among victim compensation program staff who interact with survivors. Focus group participants emphasized that empathy goes a long way in improving their experiences. Survivor Griselle Jones had a positive experience applying for and receiving compensation in New Jersey. Not only does Jones remember the application itself being “user friendly” but she also had multiple phone calls and “a personal connection” with the staff member—a social worker—who was assigned to her case.¹¹⁹ She explains that this support helped her heal. Jones' experience applying for victim compensation should be the norm for survivors across the country.¹²⁰ In 2020, the OVC launched a resource from Project Trust that helps organizations become trauma-informed.¹²¹ In addition to requiring staff to participate in trainings on trauma-informed communication, state CVC programs should adopt this guidance in full and periodically review how they are maintaining a trauma-informed culture.

Extending application filing time limits is another way to be more responsive to survivors' needs. Per the results of the document analysis, 28 states require survivors to apply for victim compensation within or by two years since the incident of harm. Two states require an application to be submitted within only six months of the incident of their harm. Victims and survivors need time and space to grieve and access support after experiencing violence or losing a loved one. States should remove time limits altogether or, at the very least, provide survivors with ample time to file victim compensation applications. The authors applaud states that do not impose any application filing time limit, such as Colorado, Kentucky, and Utah.

Reduce law enforcement's role in determining victim compensation eligibility and award amounts

If we're looking at community healing, it doesn't really matter what the circumstances of this person being killed [were]. We should be helping the family [that's] bearing the burden of the funeral so that we can ... offset future harm and help this family heal.

— Amanda Tonkovich, former Louisiana Crime Victims Reparations board member, with Beyond Harm NOLA, a violence prevention organization based in New Orleans¹²²

For far too long, receiving victim compensation has hinged on the subjective observations and opinions of law enforcement personnel. In a country where Black people are 3 1/2 times more likely than white people to be murdered by police, victim compensation programs that require survivors to interact with law enforcement are racially inequitable.¹²³ States should disentangle law enforcement from the victim compensation eligibility process. A victim's or survivor's past or current involvement in the criminal legal system should not be a factor in determining compensation eligibility. Likewise, removing requirements that force cooperation with police, reforming contributory conduct policies that blame victims, and making victims and survivors of police violence eligible to receive compensation would dramatically improve victim compensation programs.

Results of this analysis indicate that 11 states explicitly deny victim compensation awards based on a victim or survivor's conviction history, outstanding warrants, unpaid fines and fees, or probation or parole status. However, it is worth noting that even if states do not explicitly deny awards to incarcerated claimants, it is likely that given the nature of prison and jail systems, many incarcerated survivors are unaware of the availability of victim compensation and do not have

the resources or support necessary to submit applications. Those with criminal legal system involvement are deeply affected by violence. According to the OVC, a nationwide survey found that 9 out of 10 people with criminal records have been victims of crime, while less than half (44 percent) of people without a criminal record are crime victims.¹²⁴ OVC goes on to explain, “For many survivors, policies that consider conviction histories may stand in the way of obtaining compensation.”¹²⁵ States should remove all restrictions on involvement with the legal system to ensure that victims and survivors of violence receive victim compensation and are seen as deserving of support. In doing so, state victim compensation programs can further realize their promise to help those most vulnerable.

Moreover, expanding access to victim compensation to incarcerated individuals and those who have criminal records or other criminal legal system involvement can help break cycles of violence. Historically shut out from social services and employment, those with conviction histories are often deprived of resources and isolated from their communities. Indeed, poverty has long been one of the strongest predictors of recidivism.¹²⁶ Those affected by the criminal legal system, who are systematically underresourced, deserve to be eligible for the financial support needed to recover from victimization. By doing so, states can also help prevent further violence and foster healing.

As previously noted in this report, less than half of victims and survivors report their victimization to law enforcement.¹²⁷ These survivors, many of whom hold marginalized identities, deserve the opportunity to access financial relief via victim compensation. States such as New York, Maryland, and Louisiana have expanded options for all survivors, who, in addition to reporting their harm to law enforcement, have the option of reporting it to medical, mental health, and/or victim service providers to demonstrate their eligibility for victim compensation.¹²⁸ All states should follow suit.

States should also stop requiring victims to cooperate with law enforcement to be eligible for victim compensation awards. In 2021, the VOCA Fix Act clarified that state victim compensation programs do not need to “promote victim cooperation with law enforcement” when “such cooperation may be impacted due to a victim’s age, physical condition, psychological state, cultural or linguistic barriers, or any other health or safety concern that jeopardizes the victim’s wellbeing.”¹²⁹ Although withdrawn, OVC 2024 proposed rule changes that also sought to further “clarify the VOCA eligibility requirement that States promote victim cooperation with the reasonable requests of law enforcement, to emphasize that the requirement applies—by statute—to *States*, not victims.”¹³⁰ In other words, nowhere in federal victim compensation law is the responsibility placed upon survivors to cooperate

with or demonstrate their cooperation with law enforcement. In addition, in their proposed rule changes OVC “expressly encourage[s] States to avoid” placing an evidentiary burden on victims to demonstrate their cooperation.¹³¹ States, however, still have considerable discretion over how they choose to enforce this policy while still complying with federal law. As a result, the adoption of policy in response to this clarification has been uneven. Analysis of state statutes in this report indicates that 46 programs still require claimants to cooperate with law enforcement to be eligible to receive compensation.

It is important to note that states not requiring victims to cooperate with law enforcement to receive victim compensation is consistent with existing federal law, despite the clarification not being codified. States can therefore revise state law to remove this requirement and remain in full compliance with federal law and continue to receive VOCA funding. In their “Dear Colleague” letter, OVC also noted that their guidance on police cooperation as one of the issue areas that received the strongest support from stakeholders who commented on the proposed rule changes.¹³²

The authors also recommend that states reform policies related to alleged contributory conduct—provisions that give administering agencies the power to deny or reduce a victim’s compensation award based on the judgment of the victim’s actions, making them, in whole or in part, responsible for their victimization. Several focus group participants shared the impact that contributory conduct denials and reductions had on their lives and the need for change. Contributory conduct policies, at their core, blame victims for their own harm. As focus group members shared, these policies compound the grief that families experience after losing their loved ones. Denying or reducing compensation due to contributory conduct therefore may stunt healing, and without healing, cycles of violence are more likely to continue.

One state that has recently made statutory changes to reduce the role of law enforcement in the victim compensation process is Maryland. Effective July 1, 2025, Maryland will be the first state in the country to remove contributory conduct reductions and denials from statute completely. The state will also no longer require survivors to report their victimization to or cooperate with law enforcement to be eligible to receive victim compensation.¹³³ The authors encourage other states to draw inspiration from Maryland and to reform their programs in a similar manner.

Finally, given the role law enforcement has in determining eligibility for victim compensation in many states, whether through reporting, cooperation, or contributory conduct, victims and survivors of police violence may be largely excluded

from receiving victim compensation. Victims and survivors of police violence deserve the funds that they need to heal from violence. As such, in addition to reducing law enforcement's general role in the victim compensation process, the authors recommend that states explicitly codify eligibility for victims and survivors of police violence in statute.

Move away from reimbursement-based models and increase the amount of compensation available for burial expenses

“Six-thousand dollars for our children’s blood being shed, in anybody’s state, on anybody’s street, is definitely not enough.”¹³⁴

— Monica Cassaberry, also known as Mizz Real¹³⁵

To better respond to survivors' acute needs, states should provide alternatives to and depart from reimbursement-based victim compensation program models. Victimization and loss can be unexpected, and many survivors do not have the money to pay for expenses up front and may delay care as a result. They also may not have proof of purchase. One provider recalled working with a 12-year-old female shooting victim.¹³⁶ Her clothes were damaged during the incident, but she was not reimbursed for her damaged clothing because she could not produce a purchase receipt. This is unacceptable. Although emergency awards are powerful mechanisms to ensure that survivors can receive money expeditiously, they are typically limited to preapproved costs such as burial expenses or relocation. The authors strongly recommend that states move away from reimbursement-based models. In the meantime, states should expand what can be covered by emergency awards and do everything in their power to ensure that survivors are compensated expeditiously.

Lastly, victim compensation funds often barely scratch the surface of survivors' needs. As noted in the limitations section, the authors recognize that, nationally, there is a need for increased, more ethical funding for victim compensation programs. States should raise caps, when possible, to accommodate rising costs, particularly burial expense caps. The average price of a burial in the United States is nearly \$10,000, but only 10 states have caps at or above that average after adjusting for the cost of living, or they have no cap at all.¹³⁷ Despite funding challenges, states should take steps to ensure that survivors can bury their loved ones with dignity.

Listen to survivors

The final and perhaps most critical recommendation is that states listen to survivors. Countless individuals have been deeply affected by violence and have channeled their grief into purpose. When implementing programmatic reforms, the authors urge states to maintain a continued presence for survivors at the table and, moreover, to center their voices.

There are many strategies states can use to ensure that programs continue to listen to, center, and be informed by survivor voices. In the Annual Performance Measures Report to the OVC, states are required to indicate if they provide a victim satisfaction survey. As of fiscal year 2022, most states reported not providing such a survey.¹³⁸ While a victim satisfaction survey would present biases based on the individuals most likely to complete it, it would also provide states with near real-time feedback on survivors' experiences with victim compensation programs, barriers they most commonly face, and the impacts of policy changes. As mentioned previously, completing a victim needs assessment and gap analysis is another way states can use federal funds to take a data-driven approach to maximize staff time and target resources to victims whose needs are not being met while addressing weaknesses where they exist. Finally, the 40 programs that have not yet done so should codify survivors' roles on victim compensation and advisory boards to ensure their practices and procedures are constantly being informed by the lived experiences of survivors.

Model policies

To support states in implementing these five key recommendations, the authors have identified the following model policies. Hopefully, states and advocates will utilize these model policies as a resource when reflecting upon and reforming their victim compensation programs. Where possible, the authors have identified states that serve as strong examples for such model policies. In some cases, aspects of policies from multiple states are highlighted to illustrate a potentially comprehensive example of a model policy.

Awareness and accessibility

Establish a broad application window

- **Model policy:** The state has no limit on the amount of time survivors can apply for compensation after their or their loved ones' victimization.
- **Strong example:** Effective May 15, 2024, Colorado no longer requires survivors to file claims for victim compensation within one year of the date of their victimization and will not impose any filing time limit, removing this language from statute.¹³⁹

Ensure language accessibility

- **Model policy:** The state makes applications for victim compensation available in all languages that at least 5 percent of households in the state speak. Webpages and other materials are translated into all applicable languages.
- **Strong example:** In New York state, English, Spanish, and Chinese (including Mandarin and Cantonese) are the most commonly spoken languages at home, with only 3.2 percent of New York residents reporting speaking a Chinese language at home.¹⁴⁰ Not only does New York provide application materials in all three of these languages, but, following the passage of a 2022 language access law,¹⁴¹ it also translates all materials into the 12 most commonly spoken languages in the state, totaling 14 languages.¹⁴²

Include a requirement to inform survivors

- **Model policy:** At a minimum state statutorily requires that victims be directly informed of their right to compensation by a first responder. The state also holds this party responsible for providing victims and survivors with written and digital information regarding victim compensation and the contact information of victim service providers to receive more information and/or support with an application for victim compensation.
- **Strong example:** It is generally difficult for states to ensure public awareness of victim compensation through statute. However, in outlining crime victims' rights, Arizona statute illustrates how states might promote awareness via statute: "The law enforcement agency that has responsibility for investigating the criminal offense shall provide electronic forms, pamphlets, information cards or other materials to the victim," including "(d) The names and telephone numbers of public and private victim assistance programs, including the county victim compensation program and programs that provide counseling, treatment and other support services."¹⁴³

Adequate compensation

Eliminate the maximum compensation limit

- **Model policy:** The state removes the maximum compensation limit. While the needs of survivors vary, violence can cause lasting injuries and long-term needs that, without support from victim compensation, are impossible to care for or meet. Therefore, survivors should not face award limits and should be allowed to have related expenses reimbursed as they arise following their injury, no matter how far into the future they may be. Furthermore, the state should not require survivors to demonstrate permanent or catastrophic injury to qualify for the maximum amount of compensation. When financially possible, the state removes caps on specific expense categories to provide increased flexibility to survivors.¹⁴⁴
- **Strong example(s):** After adjusting for the cost of living, Washington has the highest maximum compensation limit among states that do not require survivors to demonstrate permanent or catastrophic injury to qualify for the maximum amount of compensation—\$190,000, or \$175,015.20 after adjusting for cost of living.¹⁴⁵ New York does not cap the amount of victim compensation survivors can receive for medical expenses.¹⁴⁶

Provide funeral and burial expense coverage

- **Model policy:** The state has a funeral and burial expense compensation limit equivalent to or greater than \$20,000, adjusted for the cost of living. The state explicitly includes a wide range of eligible funeral and burial-related expenses such as flowers, food, and transportation, but does not statutorily restrict which expenses beyond those described are covered.
- **Strong example(s):** Utah's victim compensation program covers funeral and burial expenses up to \$14,000, well above the 2023 national median cost.¹⁴⁷ The maximum compensation award for funeral/burial costs in Alaska is \$10,000. The state has one of the most expansive definitions of which expenses associated with funerals and burials can be covered, reading as follows:

Casket/urn or similar vessel, funeral services, burial vault, cremation costs, grave marker, flowers, transportation of body, memorial meal, and burial clothing; In addition, for Alaska Native or other culturally appropriate burial ceremonies: food baskets and other expenses related to the traditional giveaway or gifting practices of tribe; and gifts to individuals for the performance of service (i.e., quilts, cooking, etc.).¹⁴⁸

Include expansive list of eligible expenses

- **Model policy:** The state's victim compensation program explicitly includes in statute that compensation awards can, at minimum, cover the following expenses: crime scene clean up, bereavement leave, nontraditional healing modalities, replacement services, legal fees, replacement for property lost or damaged due to victimization, or confiscation for the purpose of evidence collection, relocation expenses, future economic support or loss of support for dependents, security improvements, travel, and accessibility modifications. While it is not possible for statute to anticipate and enumerate every possible expense that may arise in a survivor's recovery and healing, by providing detail in statute, states can reduce the administrative burden on administrators to determine what are or are not reasonable expenses under a given category, and, more importantly, ensure survivors have accurate expectations about which expenses will or will not be reimbursed.
- **Strong example(s):** No state covers all these expense categories. However, there are several strong examples of how coverage can be outlined in statute. In the chart below, the authors include a model policy for each category, as well as an inexhaustive list of examples of expense coverage by category. The more expansive and explicit coverage is for a category, the better.

TABLE 3

Model policies for statutorily included eligible expenses

Recommended policy for each eligible expense included in rubric and state examples

Category	Model policy	State example(s)
Crime scene cleanup	State is as expansive as possible in its definition of what crime scene cleanup may entail.	Rhode Island's victim compensation program covers crime scene cleanup, defined as follows: "Crime scene clean-up refers to the professional bio-hazard clean-up, disinfecting, and removal or attempted removal of items contaminated by blood or other bodily fluids, dirt stains or other debris caused by the crime for which victim or Applicant is seeking compensation. This may include the removal or attempted removal of stains, odors and broken glass to the premises and/or property where the crime occurred." [i]
Bereavement leave	State covers bereavement leave for survivors of victims to grieve and to attend a funeral or burial. State extends this coverage for as long as possible to individuals with a wide variety of relationships.	While only available to immediate family members, Alabama covers bereavement leave as follows: "A victim's immediate family member may be granted compensation for a maximum of four weeks of lost wages without a doctor's excuse. A doctor's excuse must be provided for lost wages in excess of four weeks to be considered for reimbursement. Employer verification is required for all bereavement leave requests." [ii]
Nontraditional healing modalities	State covers a variety of nontraditional healing modalities, including religious and tribal healing methods.	Iowa's statutory definition of medical care includes services from a variety of practitioners, as well healing methods from federally recognized nations or tribes as follows: "'Medical care' means services provided by or provided under the supervision of a person licensed under Iowa law as a medical physician or surgeon, physician assistant, osteopathic physician or surgeon, chiropractor, podiatrist, physical therapist, acupuncturist, or dentist. Medical care also includes services rendered in accordance with a method of healing sanctioned by a federally recognized sovereign nation or tribe." [iii] Hawaii includes "nontraditional medicine" as an eligible expense under its administrative rules, and the states defines "nontraditional medicine" as "massage therapy, acupuncture, [and] cultural or traditional-based healing." [iv]
Replacement services/child care	State covers replacement services as expansively as possible, including but not limited to child care, home upkeep, and other caregiving.	Michigan covers: "(d) Replacement services for homemaking tasks, child care, and other services previously performed by an individual...that, because of the victim's injury, or the claimant's attendance at a victim services organization to receive services related to the crime, must temporarily or permanently be performed by another person." Notably, the Michigan statute makes explicit that all individuals eligible for an award, and not just direct victims, may be approved for expenses related to replacement services as defined. [v]
Legal fees	State covers legal fees pertaining to the victimization that occurred, as well as legal fees related to filing or appealing a victim compensation application.	New Jersey's covers victims and survivors' attorneys' fees as follows: "The Office may allow payment of an attorney fee, including costs, up to a maximum of \$10,000, to an attorney who provides legal assistance to a victim in any legal matter, other than a decision of the Office, arising from, or related to, having been the victim of the offense that forms the basis of the victim's or claimant's application for compensation." [vi] New Jersey also provides coverage for attorneys fees related to filing or appealing a victim compensation claim as follows: "The Office may, as part of any order for payment, determine and allow reasonable attorney fees and costs, which shall not exceed 15 percent of the amount awarded as compensation, to an attorney representing an applicant in seeking compensation from the Office." [vii]

continues

Category	Model policy	State example(s)
Replacement for property lost, damaged as a result of victimization, or confiscated for the purpose of evidence collection	State covers most possible property lost, damaged, or confiscated for evidence collection.	New York covers “essential personal property,” defined as “articles of personal property necessary and essential to the health, welfare or safety of the victim.”[viii] Specifically, “any award made for the cost of repair or replacement of essential personal property, including cash losses of essential personal property, shall be limited to an amount of twenty-five hundred dollars, except that all cash losses of essential personal property shall be limited to the amount of one hundred dollars. In the case of medically necessary life-sustaining equipment which was lost or damaged as the direct result of a crime, the award shall be limited to the amount of ten thousand dollars.”[ix]
Relocation expenses	State covers relocation expenses including emergency shelter and/or temporary lodging, security deposits, rent, moving costs, storage, and phone and utility installation fees.	Washington, D.C. provides victim compensation for moving expenses (up to \$1,500), emergency food (up to \$400), and housing expenses (up to \$3,000 or a period of up to 120 days) upon the referral by a prosecutor, law enforcement officer, judicial officer, medical or mental health services provider, or victims advocate.[x] Minnesota explicitly covers moving expenses, defined as follows: “The claimant’s moving expenses, storage fees, and phone and utility installation fees, up to a maximum of \$1,000 per claim, if the move is necessary. ...”[xi]
Future economic support or loss of support for dependents	State covers loss of support for dependents of a victim as expansively as possible. State also covers future loss of earnings for victims and survivors, including those who were self-employed, whose employment consisted of household or homemaker responsibilities, or who were receiving unemployment benefits at the time of their victimization.	Oregon has a high rate of coverage for loss of support, as follows: “When a claim for compensation is filed in a case of death, compensation may be awarded for:... (d) loss of support to the dependents of the victim, at a maximum rate of \$800 per week, up to a maximum amount of \$20,000, less any amounts awarded for loss of earnings.”[xii] Wyoming covers future loss of earnings and provides specific parameters for cases in which the victim or survivor was self-employed or whose sole employment was household responsibilities.[xiii] Ohio covers unemployment benefits loss, described as follows: “Unemployment benefits loss’ means a loss of unemployment benefits pursuant to Chapter 4141. of the Revised Code when the loss arises solely from the inability of a victim to meet the able to work, available for suitable work, or the actively seeking suitable work requirements of division (A)(4)(a) of section 4141.29 of the Revised Code.”[xiv] Washington also covers future economic loss for victims who were not fully employed at the time of the incident. Washington state statute reads: “If the victim was not gainfully employed at the time of the criminal act, no financial support for lost wages will be paid to the victim or any beneficiaries, unless the victim was gainfully employed for a total of at least twelve weeks in the six months preceding the date of the criminal act.”[xv] Colorado covers future economic loss for survivors of domestic violence in the event that the victim was dependent on financial support from their abuser. Colorado statute reads that household support is a compensable expense when: “(I) The offender is accused of committing the criminally injurious conduct that is the basis of the dependent’s claim under this article; (II) As a result of the criminal event, the offender vacated any home the offender shared with the dependent; and (III) The dependent provides verification of dependency on the offender at the time of the criminal event.”[xvi]
Security improvements	State covers the replacement, installation, and increase of security measures including locks, windows, doors, and security systems.	Michigan covers a variety of both replacement and new security measures, including “installing, increasing, or replacing residential security, which may include installing a home security device or system; replacing or repairing windows or locks; or increasing the number of locks.”[xvii]

continues

Category	Model policy	State example(s)
Travel	State covers travel related to funerals and burials, medical and mental health appointments, and legal proceedings related to the incident of harm that occurred.	Arizona covers the following transportation costs: “6. Reasonable and customary transportation costs related to :a. Obtaining medical care as defined in subsection (C)(1),b. Obtaining mental health counseling and care as defined in subsection (C) (4),c. A victim or derivative victim attending a criminal court proceeding, clemency hearing, parole hearing, or execution directly related to the incident of criminally injurious conduct, d. The victim obtaining a medical forensic examination or participating in a medical forensic interview, and e. Responding to a substantiated threat to the safety or well-being of the victim or a derivative victim listed in R10-4-101(10)(d).”[xviii] Pennsylvania provides coverage of specific costs associated with “travel in connection with making the funeral arrangements, transport of the body and attendance of funeral services,” including but not limited to meals, lodging, private vehicle usage, vehicle rental, tolls and parking, and lodging.[xix]
Accessibility modifications	State covers the purchasing and installation of necessary equipment to the victim’s home and/or vehicle to ensure daily life functions can be performed without undue hardship.	Illinois covers the “purchase, lease, or rental of equipment necessary to create usability of and accessibility to the victim’s real and personal property, or the real and personal property, which is used by the victim, necessary as a result of the crime.” Illinois statute further stipulates that personal property includes, but is not limited to, “vehicles, houses, apartments, townhouses, or condominiums.”[xx]

Source: A full list of sources is available [here](#).

Eligibility barriers

Remove barriers based on law enforcement cooperation

- **Model policy:** The state does not deny or reduce victim compensation awards based on a victim or survivor’s cooperation with law enforcement.
- **Strong example:** Effective January 1, 2024, Oregon eliminated the requirement that victims, survivors, or claimants cooperate with law enforcement, removing this from statute.¹⁴⁹

Remove barriers based on mandatory police reporting

- **Model policy:** The state does not require survivors to report their victimization to police. The state allows survivors to report their victimization to an entity that is not affiliated with the justice system, such as a medical provider, mental health provider, or victim service provider.
- **Strong example:** In statute, Louisiana specifically provides the following, “An adult victim of a criminal offense is not required to report the crime to any law enforcement officer in order to file an application.”¹⁵⁰ Louisiana’s Revised Statute clarifies that acceptable form of proof that a crime resulting in personal injury occurred includes “certification of the crime signed under oath by any licensed clinical social worker, professional counselor, or healthcare provider that conducted an examination of the injuries resulting from the commission of the crime.”¹⁵¹ Ideally, states include additional alternatives, such as victim services providers. States such as Maryland and New York outline such alternatives. For example, effective December 31, 2025, New York will allow reporting to:

*A ‘victim services provider’ which shall mean a city or state contracted victim service provider who has provided services to the victim of the crime, or other eligible claimants as identified in section six hundred twenty-four of this article, or a licensed medical or mental health services provider providing care to a victim of crime within their licensed discipline and who can attest that the victim of a crime suffered a personal physical injury related to or connected to the crime upon which the claim is based.*¹⁵²

Effective July 1, 2025, Maryland will allow reporting to a “qualified third party,” defined as:

*(1) a licensed physician, dentist, or psychologist authorized to practice under the Health Occupations Article; (2) a social worker or caseworker of any public or private health or social services agency or provider; or (3) an advocate or victim service provider from a domestic violence or sexual assault prevention or assistance program.*¹⁵³

Broaden the definition of who is considered a victim’s survivor

- **Model policy:** The state makes individuals eligible for victim compensation who have significant relationships to victims beyond household, legal, or blood relationships, and make those individuals eligible for the most possible areas of expense coverage.
- **Strong example:** In addition to including a broad list of eligible relatives and household members, Washington, D.C.’s, statute includes those with “close ties to the victim” under the category of “secondary victims” eligible for compensation. The state’s full definition of “secondary victim” is as follows:

*‘Secondary victim’ means a: (A) Victim’s spouse, children, including biological, step, foster, and adopted, grandchildren, parents, stepparents, siblings, half siblings, or spouse’s parents; (B) Person who resides in the victim’s household at the time of the crime or at the time of the discovery of the crime; (C) Person who is a survivor of a victim and who was wholly or partially dependent upon the victim for care and support at the time of the commission of the crime upon which the claim is based, including a child of the victim born after the victim’s death; (D) Person who legally assumes the obligation, or who voluntarily pays the medical expenses, or in the event of death caused by the crime, funeral and burial expenses, incurred as a direct result thereof; (E) person with close ties to the victim; or (F) person who witnessed the crime.*¹⁵⁴

Make witnesses eligible

- **Model policy:** The state makes witnesses to violence regardless of their relationship to the victim eligible for victim compensation.
- **Strong example:** Arizona’s statutory definition of “derivative victim” includes “d. A member of the victim’s family who witnessed the criminally injurious conduct or who discovered the scene of the criminally injurious conduct;” and “e. A natural person who is not related to the victim but who witnessed the criminally injurious conduct or discovered the scene of the criminally injurious conduct.”¹⁵⁵

Provide compensation to others who assumed costs

- **Model policy:** State makes eligible persons who assumed an obligation for or paid an expense directly, regardless of their relationship to the victim.
- **Strong example:** Georgia statute includes among those eligible for victim compensation, “(5) Any person who is not a direct service provider and who assumes the cost of an eligible expense of a victim regardless of such person’s relationship to the victim or whether such person is a dependent of the victim.”¹⁵⁶

Remove barriers based on conviction history, fines and fees, correctional control

- **Model policy:** The state does not deny victim compensation awards based on a victim or applicant’s arrest or conviction history, probation or parole status, or due to outstanding warrants, fines, or fees.
- **Strong example:** Some states have removed such considerations, while others, such as Louisiana, include explicit provisions. The authors applaud and encourage both approaches. Louisiana statute stipulates the following:

*No victim or claimant shall be denied or otherwise deemed ineligible for reparations pursuant to this Chapter, nor shall any award for reparations pursuant to this Chapter be reduced, on the basis that the victim or claimant has any conviction or adjudication of delinquency, on the basis that the victim or claimant is currently on probation or parole, or on the basis that the victim or claimant has previously served any sentence of incarceration, probation, or parole unrelated to the offense for which reparations would otherwise be awarded pursuant to this Chapter.*¹⁵⁷

Remove barriers based on incarceration

- **Model policy:** The state does not consider a victim or applicant’s incarceration status when awarding victim compensation. The state allows incarcerated individuals to apply for victim compensation, regardless of if their or their loved one’s victimization occurred during their incarceration.

- **Strong example:** No state specifies eligibility for victim compensation for incidents of harm that occur while the survivor is incarcerated in statute. However, in 2020, New Jersey removed language in statute that specifically barred individuals from receiving a compensation award on the basis of being convicted of a crime and incarcerated.¹⁵⁸

Remove contributory conduct restrictions

- **Model policy:** The state does not consider a victim, survivor, or claimant's "contributory conduct" when determining a victim compensation award.
- **Strong example:** Effective July 1, 2025, Maryland does not consider "contributory conduct" when determining a victim compensation award.¹⁵⁹

Experience with the process

Include survivor perspective in policymaking

- **Model policy:** At least one person who has previously applied for state victim compensation and/or who is either a survivor of violence or survivor of a victim of violence is included in the policymaking process of a state's victim compensation program, be it as a member of the state's victim compensation board, advisory council, or similar body. Ideally, this person(s) is a member of a community that experiences disproportionately high rates of violence.
- **Strong example:** Effective July 1, 2025, Maryland's victim compensation board will include representation from survivors of violence from communities most affected by violence, as follows:

*(a) There is a Criminal Injuries Compensation Board in the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services. (b)(1) The Board consists of seven members. (2) The membership of the Board shall reflect the racial, ethnic, geographic, and gender diversity of the State. (3) Of the seven members of the Board: (i) one shall be a family member of a homicide victim; (ii) at least one shall be a survivor of violence who is a member of a community that experiences disproportionately high rates of violence and incarceration; and (iii) at least one shall be a representative of an organization that provides assistance to victims applying for victim compensation.*¹⁶⁰

Provide emergency awards

- **Model policy:** The state includes a provision for emergency awards that does not require upfront payment for services from survivors or claimants. Such emergency awards are not capped at specific amounts, nor restricted to specific types of expenses.

- **Strong example:** Kansas provides emergency awards to survivors and claimants and does not specify a maximum award amount, as follows:

*If the board determines that the claimant will suffer financial hardship unless a tentative award is made, and it appears likely that a final award will be made, an amount may be paid to the claimant and shall be deducted from the final award, or shall be repaid by and recoverable from the claimant to the extent that it exceeds the final award.*¹⁶¹

Minnesota also provides emergency awards to survivors and claimants and does not specify a maximum award amount. In statute, Minnesota outlines some, but not all, of the types of costs that emergency awards can cover as follows:

*The commissioner of public safety shall make grants to prosecutors and victim assistance programs for the purpose of providing emergency assistance to victims. As used in this section, ‘emergency assistance’ includes but is not limited to: (1) replacement of necessary property that was lost, damaged, or stolen as a result of the crime; (2) purchase and installation of necessary home security devices; (3) transportation to locations related to the victim’s needs as a victim, such as medical facilities and facilities of the criminal justice system; (4) cleanup of the crime scene; (5) reimbursement for reasonable travel and living expenses the victim incurred to attend court proceedings that were held at a location other than the place where the crime occurred due to a change of venue; and (6) reimbursement of towing and storage fees incurred due to impoundment of a recovered stolen vehicle.*¹⁶²

Conclusion

Victim compensation is a lifeline for survivors of violence in a sea of loss, fear, and financial uncertainty. These funds can help survivors bury loved ones with dignity, prevent homelessness, heal from injury, ensure survivors' safety, and more. No one knows better than survivors how life-changing this support can be. Survivors, as well as advocates and providers, are also experts in what is needed to ensure that all of those who experience violence have access to victim compensation.

This report highlights that states, nationwide, have reformed victim compensation programs to increase equity and to better meet the needs of all survivors. However, the analysis in this report reveals that, while model policies can be found across the United States, significant work still needs to be done in every state to ensure that survivors receive adequate, timely, accessible, and equitable support in the aftermath of harm. Survivors, legislators, and advocates should use the findings and recommendations of this report to improve victim compensation laws and to develop more, equitable, expansive, and inclusive victim compensation programs.

Increasing access to victim compensation will catalyze community healing. As survivor Griselle Jones puts it, “having those victim compensation funds helping people ... that is the one way to prevent further violence.” Survivors of violence deserve safety, healing, and support—regardless of their racial identity, the language they speak, their comfortability with law enforcement, and a multitude of other factors that currently prevent many from receiving victim compensation. States should continue to reform their victim compensation programs so that all survivors receive the financial support they need to heal.

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