

2021 / VICTIM COMPENSATION

REMOVING BARRIERS TO MICHIGAN'S VICTIM SERVICES

Crime is a traumatic experience for nearly everyone who has been a victim. For many, this is compounded by significant challenges associated with recovery—in Michigan, that includes challenges accessing support.

This is a result of barriers built into current Michigan law. But the state has an opportunity to improve healing and public safety by enacting proven policies, supported by survivors across the state, creating a strong support system for crime victims.

What is victim compensation? Direct financial support to a victim or victim's family for an expense that resulted from a crime, such as funeral and burial costs, medical expenses, lost wages, counseling, relocation, and other costs.

Michigan's Crime Victim Services Commission (CVSC) Compensation Program has both the lowest application rate for victim's compensation (as a share of reported Part I violent crimes) of any state in the country, and a higher denial rate than the national average of 23%. In 2018, the CVSC denied 30% of applications it received—awarding just 581 victim compensation claims for an average of \$3,813 each.

Michigan must update its current systems to better help survivors, breaking down barriers including:

VICTIM EXCLUSION

Many victims of crime are currently excluded from accessing victim compensation because their trauma was not physical or fatal—including survivors who were held up at gunpoint, survivors of stalking, some survivors of sexual harm, and other violent crimes where the victim did not suffer a physical injury but suffered extreme trauma with a threat of injury.

LIMITED ACCESSIBILITY

Trauma is long-lasting, and those who suffer may not be ready to seek help immediately. But while the impacts of crime don't expire, Michigan currently has an unreasonable time limit to access support.

Survivors have just 48 hours to report a crime if they intend to apply for victim's compensation—the shortest reporting limit in the country. At least 45 states have longer limits, and at least 7 have none at all. After meeting the reporting deadline, survivors typically have just one year to apply for compensation, compared to 29 states with longer application time limits.

INADEQUATE SUPPORT

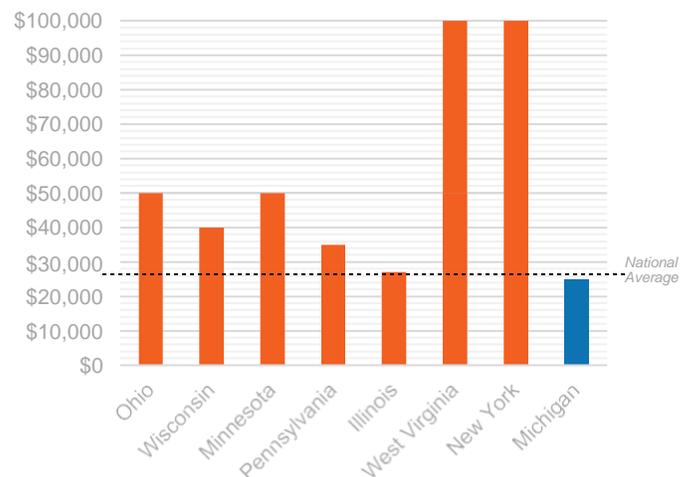
Michigan currently covers up to \$350/week in lost wages or support resulting from a covered crime. For most victims, that's not enough to cover rent on a two-bedroom apartment, let alone living expenses.

The state also restricts coverage on expenses critical to trauma recovery, including:

- **Expenses for victims seeking to relocate** for safety or emotional wellbeing following the crime. In comparison, at least 25 states cover relocation.
- **Travel expenses** for things like attending funerals and court appearances. At least 42 states cover travel expenses to varying degrees. Michigan only covers travel for medical appointments and only if the survivor can prove that treatment is not available locally.
- **Sufficient costs for a funeral and burial.** Michigan only covers up to \$5,000 in funeral/burial expenses—just over half of what the National Funeral Directors Association estimate is needed.

When there is an urgent need for funds, which is often true for families paying funeral expenses in homicide cases, Michigan only offers up to \$500 in emergency awards. These funds are often subject to delays, and barely make a dent in the cost of a funeral.

In Michigan, compensation covers a maximum of \$25,000 for any application—below the national average, and well below actual costs. This cap has not been raised in over a decade despite statewide cost of living increases. In comparison to nearby states, this number is alarmingly low.



SOURCES

Analysis of US Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime, FY 2018 Annual Performance Measures Reports - Victim Compensation Formula Grant Program; FBI Crime in the United States, 2017; US Census Bureau, Population Division. Table 3. Est. of Resident Population Change for the United States, Regions, States, and Puerto Rico and Region and State Rankings: 7/1/17-7/1/18 Analysis of US Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime, FY 2018 Annual Performance Measures Reports - Victim Compensation Formula Grant Program.
Evans, D.N. (2014) Compensating Victims of Crime. Research & Evaluation Center, John Jay College of Criminal Justice.
Alliance for Safety and Justice survey of state compensation program websites and statutes
National Funeral Directors Association (2019). National Median Cost of an Adult Funeral with Viewing and Burial: 2019 vs. 2014. Retrieved from: <https://nfd.org/news/statistics>
Alliance for Safety and Justice analysis of compensation program websites in 50 states.