

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Common Justice, Councilmembers Mercedes Narcisse and Tiffany Cabán celebrate the passage of Resolution #0025-2022, which calls upon NYS to pass A.8619A (Meeks)/S.7573 (Myrie) in order to expand access to victim compensation funds.

New York, NY – Today, the New York City Council passed Resolution 0025-2022, sponsored by Councilwoman Mercedes Narcisse which calls upon the New York State legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign, A.8619A (Meeks)/S.7573 (Myrie). If passed, this legislation would expand eligibility for victims and survivors of crime to access victim compensation funds.

Victim compensation is state-administered, federal funding that is provided to survivors of crime to compensate them for costs associated with their harm, including medical bills, replacement of personal property, and even burial expenses. Access to these funds helps survivors regain stability and find healing after experiencing traumatic events. A.8619A (Meeks)/S.7573 (Myrie) expands access to this financial relief by removing New York’s onerous law enforcement reporting requirement that survivors are subjected to when attempting to apply for victim compensation. The bill achieves this by changing the law in three major ways (1) expands the type of evidence that survivors may use to show that a qualifying crime has occurred to include statements from medical providers, statements from victim service providers, self-attestation, video and photographic evidence, and witness attestation; (2) allows survivors who do choose to report their harm to police more time to do so by extending the time required to report from one week to a reasonable amount of time; and (3) extends the Office of Victim Services (OVS) filing deadline from one year to seven years.

This is a social and racial equity bill. In the United States, each year, over 50% of violent victimizations go unreported to law enforcement. The law enforcement reporting requirement for victim compensation disparately impacts Black and Brown communities, who are less likely than other groups to report their harm to law enforcement due to distrust fueled by years of well-

documented racial profiling, police violence, and impunity. Other marginalized populations, including immigrant survivors, LGBTQIA+ survivors and survivors of gender-based violence, may choose not to report their harm to the police due to fear of retaliation, fear of deportation or unfair treatment, or relationship dynamics. A.8619A (Meeks)/S.7573 (Myrie) ensures that all survivors have access to healing funds, regardless of their comfort level with law enforcement. Financial relief is crucial to healing. Healing is crucial to breaking cycles of violence. Victim compensation is one avenue through which to interrupt cycles of violence.

This legislation is the first bill of the Fair Access to Victim Compensation (FAVC) Campaign. The #FAVC Campaign is a state-wide public education and legislative campaign that aims to make New York State's victim compensation laws and policies more equitable by removing barriers victims and survivors face when attempting to collect these life-saving funds. Common Justice and its partners launched this campaign in October of 2021. Since then, the campaign has gained the support of over 35 organizations. The #FAVC Coalition leads efforts to educate survivors, public officials, and the general public about New York's victim compensation program, and to propose several legislative bills to address the known barriers victims and survivors face, as well as barriers discovered over the course of the campaign. A full list of supporters and more information on the Fair Access to Victim Compensation Campaign can be found at <https://action.commonjustice.org/favc-campaign-1>.

Statements from elected officials, impacted people, and community and advocacy groups from the Fair Access to Victim Compensation Coalition:

“When a system is broken, as elected officials it is our duty to fix it. Far too many victims in marginalized communities do not report crimes against them to the police. The law enforcement reporting requirement for victim compensation adversely impacts Black and Brown, LGBTQIA+ and the immigrant communities, who are traditionally less likely than other groups to report their harm to law enforcement. There is no doubt that accessing crime victim compensation is part of a broken system. It is my hope that City Council Resolution 0025-2022 can be a catalyst for change and urge the New York State legislature to pass A.8619A (Meeks)/S.7573 (Myrie) to expand eligibility for victims and survivors of crime to access victim compensation funds and bring further equity to the compensation process.” - **Councilmember Mercedes Narcisse, Brooklyn, NY, 46th Council District**

"We know that many survivors go without the services they need and deserve, and that this is especially true of those on the losing side of various hierarchies and double standards: lower-income survivors, survivors of color, undocumented survivors, unhoused survivors, disabled survivors, survivors doing criminalized survival work, and more. Furthermore, we know that the barrier standing between many of these groups and the services they are entitled to is the imperative to file a police report. We must do all we can to remove that and other barriers, so that survivors may heal, grow, and build a life free from fear for their safety.” - **Councilmember Tiffany Cabán, Queens, NY, 22nd Council District**

“It is simple for us: we believe all survivors deserve to heal and be safe. New York's current law makes healing and safety a privilege available only to survivors who call the police when they have been harmed. Making victim compensation dependent on cooperation with law enforcement

disproportionately excludes Black and brown survivors and survivors from other marginalized groups who have had negative experiences with the criminal legal system from accessing financial relief. This further compounds their pain and experience of inequity. We do not believe that trust in the police and the criminal justice system should be a prerequisite for healing and safety. The good news is that we now have an opportunity in New York to get this right and lead the way in putting survivors first. Today, by passing Resolution 0025, we take a major first step towards removing obstacles that stand between New York's survivors and the support they all deserve." - **Danielle Sered, Executive Director of Common Justice**

"We must do everything we can to support victims and survivors of violent crime, and that means cutting the red tape so they can receive life-saving compensation. By recognizing the realities survivors face, our Fair Access to Victim Compensation bill can center their needs and keep all of us safe and secure. I'm grateful to Council Member Narcisse and her colleagues for supporting us in this fight." - **Senator Zellnor Myrie, New York State 20th Senate District**

"Countless victims of violence face significant obstacles in acclimating back to a sense of normalcy. Residents throughout our state have felt unheard and ignored after enduring traumatic experiences. We have an obligation to make victims of violence whole. Racial and economic justice is at the center of our efforts as we work to address tremendous disparities embedded within our system. While there is a system in place to compensate victims of crime, we must do our due diligence to ensure that victims are compensated fairly. In our most overlooked communities, nearly 25% of Black Americans are more likely to be victims of serious violent crimes and very few of them receive victim compensation benefits. It is time that services assist in providing equitable resources to the people of New York. We are calling upon the state legislature to pass the Fair Access to Victim Compensation Bill as we continue to fight to guarantee the rights of members of our community." - **Assemblymember Demond Meeks, New York State Assembly District 137**

"Black and Brown New Yorkers are disproportionately impacted by gun violence across our state and yet victims of color are the least likely to access NYS's victim compensation funds. Black and Brown victims and survivors are frequently barred from compensation because current state law requires victims to report to law enforcement. We applaud the NYC Council for passing this resolution in support of the State's legislation S.7573/A.8619A, which would add alternative reporting requirements to ensure that all victims of gun violence have equitable access to these necessary funds. We thank Councilmembers Narcisse and Caban for their leadership on Resolution 0025 and look forward to seeing this life-saving bill become law in Albany this session." - **Rebecca Fischer, Executive Director of New Yorkers Against Gun Violence**

"All victims of violent crime deserve access to crucial resources to cover the devastating financial impacts those crimes often reap. This bill acknowledges victim compensation as a social equity issue, ensuring that victims from New York's most heavily impacted communities have the ability to utilize these life-altering funds as fairly as possible. Moms Demand Action volunteers are excited to support this important legislation." - **Marie Delus, Volunteer at Moms Demand Action – New York Chapter**

"Safe Horizon, the nation's largest non-profit victim assistance organization, strongly supports the Fair Access to Victim Compensation bill (A.8619-A/S.7573) introduced by State Senator Zellnor

Myrie and Assembly Member Demond Meeks. This state legislation would authorize the New York State Office of Victim Services (OVS) to offer victim compensation to a broader array of victims by not relying solely on police reports as documentation that a crime took place. Safe Horizon supports the choices a victim might make in finding paths to safety - whether that's reporting a crime to the police, calling a hotline to get help with safety planning, or seeking refuge in a domestic violence shelter. Regardless of where one goes to find healing, OVS should offer to help defray any costs incurred as a result of a crime. Safe Horizon is grateful to Council Member Mercedes Narcisse and her colleagues for introducing Resolution 25 in support of the Fair Access to Victim Compensation bill and we urge the full Council to vote in favor.”

- **Michael Polenberg, Vice President of Government Affairs at Safe Horizon**

“At Violence Intervention Program (VIP), we work with Latinx survivors to address domestic and sexual violence. Each year, VIP serves 1,500+ survivors plus their children, directly impacting nearly 4,000 individuals. The vast majority of our clients are low income, immigrant, single mothers of color, approximately 75% of whom earn less than \$15,000 a year. Our locations are situated within low-income, Latinx communities in Queens, Harlem and the Bronx – in neighborhoods with high concentrations of immigrants. When survivors come to us for support, they hear about the options available through the crime victim’s compensation fund multiple times and from a variety of sources, including our hotline counselors, counselor/advocates, social workers, interns and volunteers. Despite abundant information and available assistance, the fact is that our survivor communities are largely ineligible for this resource because of its strict requirements regarding “evidence” of the crimes suffered by survivors and inadequate time to report crimes and/or submit applications. Arguably the communities most in need of this resource, immigrants and Latinx victims of crime are largely shut out from this potential assistance. The goals of the crime victims compensation fund would be better met by changing these restrictions and opening the doors to the high number of victimized women – especially women of color – who are currently denied assistance when they need it most. That’s why VIP has signed on to the Fair Access to Victim Compensation Campaign and why we encourage New York State’s legislature to pass S.7573/A.8619A. We thank Council Members Narcisse and Cabán for their leadership in passing Resolution 0025-2022, telling the State why this is critical for marginalized New Yorkers. It’s time to reduce obstacles to healing and recovery from violence.” - **Margarita Guzmán, Executive Director of VIP (VIP) Mujeres**

“When the New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NYSCASA) submitted our testimony to the New York City Committee on Women and Gender Equity, we felt confident that the City Council would do the right thing and stand in support of the New York State (A8619A/S7573) “Fair Access to Victim Compensation” legislation. NYSCASA is delighted that the New York City Council is doing just that by passing this resolution in support of the legislation. Survivors of crimes related to sexual violence must have equitable access to the funds that help bring stability to their lives and empower survivors to the fullest extent possible. We are glad to see that the NYC Council agrees. NYSCASA would like to thank the sponsors of this bill, Assemblymember Demond Meeks and Senator Zellnor Myrie, for their advocacy towards this measure, as well as our partner organizations, including Common Justice, for their continued efforts to pass this bill. The proposed legislation will help New York State provide the economic justice that sexual violence survivors need and deserve. The New York State Legislature must see this truth as well.” - **Max Micallef, Public Policy Director at New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NYSCASA)**

“New York’s current eligibility requirements for victim compensation funds leave far too many New Yorkers without the financial support they deserve. Now is the time to envision an equitable reimbursement system for all victims of crime. The Fair Access to Victim Compensation legislation (A8619A/S7573) accomplishes this by expanding acceptable documentation for victim compensation claims, lengthening the time frame victims can report a crime from one year to seven years, and allowing self-attestation. NYSCADV thanks Assemblymember Meeks and Senator Myrie, as well as our community partners including Common Justice, for envisioning a New York where victims of crime are screened in, not out, when it comes to crime victim funds.” - **Joan Gerhardt, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy at New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NYSCADV)**

“KAVI is proud to stand with the NYC Council in supporting victims by guaranteeing they have fair access to compensation. The Fair Access to Victims Compensation advances both equity and healing. Every day we see the impacts of the restrictive rules that govern victim compensation funds and how this deepens the traumatic impact of violence and delays victims’ healing. The survivors and families we work with often need an array of resources such as support with hospital and funeral expenses, mental health services and housing supports that will stabilize their lives during an extremely vulnerable period. This legislation provides support that aids victims healing and helps to avoid future violent incidents. We urge the State Legislature and Governor to do their part to remove these barriers.” - **Anthony Buissereth and Ramik Williams, Co-Executive Directors of Kings Against Violence Initiative (KAVI)**

“Compensation and support services are essential to victims’ healing from violence and harm, and healing can play a vital role in preventing violence and building public safety. We take another step toward true justice, especially for those in Black and brown communities, by expanding access to these resources, which is exactly what the bill associated with this resolution would do.” - **Jamila Hodge, Executive Director of Equal Justice USA**

“The Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI) supports this legislation because it seeks to abolish the barriers victims and survivors face to receive necessary compensation for recovery. These barriers re-traumatizes survivors and hinders recovery. Black Immigrant survivors are particularly vulnerable because calling the police may result in the separation of their family via detention and deportation and/or lose their pathway to citizenship. This funding is necessary to help survivors, especially survivors of police violence, to heal and move forward in life.” - **Abraham Paulos, Deputy Director of Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI)**

“We must support all victims and survivors of crime, including those who, for many valid reasons, don't report the harms against them to police. Removing New York's victim compensation barriers would help survivors heal. We support the Fair Access to Victim Compensation Campaign because we know that equitable access to healing resources promotes a safe and just society for everyone.” - **Jose Saldana, Director of the Release Aging People in Prison (RAPP) Campaign**

“Denial of victim compensation has become a norm for survivors of violence. We at Not Another Child hope that the Fair Access to Victim Compensation (FAVC) legislation will be the segue to addressing additional racism and discrimination which is embedded within crime victim compensation. Not Another Child supports the FAVC legislation as it will give access to those in

need during a traumatic time” - **Oresa Napper-Williams, Founder & CEO of Not Another Child**

“When you think of the "justice" system, is justice something you actually feel? When I imagine the “justice” system, I envision a pitch-black enormous wall, impossible for us to cross. The legal system was built to oppress Black and Brown people. This is why the Fair Access to Victim Compensation Bill is vital for people who look like me. Folks would benefit from this Bill because it will increase their access to better, and more efficient resources like therapy, housing, youth programs, child care, and more. S.O.U.L. supports femmes and nonbinary youth who experience school pushout, are between housing issues, and foster care. This bill would help us help them get the resources they need without the fight. Resources will no longer be our fight, they will be our reality.” - **Afia Blackwood-Foster, Youth Organizer at S.O.U.L. Sisters Leadership Collective**

We thank all of the NYC Council for acknowledging that we must address the barriers that victims and survivors face with victim compensation.

Follow online: <https://action.commonjustice.org/favc-campaign-1>

Link to resolution: <https://tinyurl.com/4ef4tvus>

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