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RE: Support for HB 2391

Chair Kropf and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to ask for your support for HB 2391 which would allocate \$23.5M for County Victim Assistance Programs.

Providing support for crime victims is an essential aspect of our criminal justice system. Ensuring victims are supported throughout the process and informed of their rights is not only the right thing to do but it is also our legal obligation.

In 2022 in Washington County, we served over 15,700 crime victims, including approximately 2,750 victims of domestic violence, 1,900 child abuse victims, 430 sexual assault victims, and 120 elder abuse victims. Approximately 20% of the victims we served required interpretation services. Our victim advocate staff is specially trained to offer trauma-informed and culturally appropriate support, with 50% of our advocates who are multi-lingual.

To provide these essential services for crime victims, we rely heavily on federal grant funding from federal Victims of Crimes Act (VOCA). However, this funding has steadily declined since 2018. And we are concerned it will continue to decline and threaten the ability to deliver these essential services.

HB 2391 ensures provides funding for a ratio of 1 victim advocate to every 4 prosecutors in officers with multiple prosecutors. In Washington County, this would help ensure that every crime victim receives these critical services.

Thank you for your support,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kevin Barton".

Kevin Barton
District Attorney for Washington County