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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.

Investing in DA's Office Victim Assistance Programs is not only investing in an essential function of the DA's office by supporting victims through the criminal justice system; it is also investing in community safety and well-being, meaningful access for communities impacted by inequity, and trauma-informed services.

Providing victim advocacy is about more than meeting the minimum threshold of our statutory and constitutional obligations. It is about having a knowledgeable and supportive liaison between the DDA and the victim who is empathetic, nonjudgmental, and who can provide information and options for the victim to make fully informed decisions. It is also about connecting victims to critical resources and population-specific services to meet their unique needs and help them heal from their trauma.

The Washington County DA's Office Victim Assistance Program served over 15,700 crime victims in 2022. This is an increase of approximately 25% since 2018 when our office served about 11,700 crime victims. In order to meet the growing needs of our community, we need to be increasing the number of victim advocates in our program every year. Unfortunately, we cannot rely on grant funding alone to meet our obligation, and the annual decline in Victims of Crime Act grants since 2018 is a significant concern.

In Washington County, at least 50% of our program is grant funded. Every year we worry that further reductions will force painful cuts to the critical services we provide.

HB 2391 provides funding for one crime victim advocate for every four DDAs in offices with multiple prosecutors. In Washington County, this funding would ensure all victims are provided the support, meaningful access, and critical services they need to navigate the criminal justice system.

Thank you for your support,

Carrie Sargavakian

Victim Assistance Director for Washington County DA's Office