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March 21, 2023

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. Crime victim advocates in DA offices provide a core function of the DAs office, supporting a crime victim through the criminal justice system.

Today, many DA victim advocate positions rely on funding from federal Victims of Crimes Act grants, which have declined annually since 2018. For example, in my county 100% of our Victim Advocate program is grant funded. Every year I am worried that further reductions will force painful cuts in the critical services we provide to crime victims every day. We are faced with a constitutional mandate to provide these important services to victims, but not a guarantee that we will be able to fully fund them. Our victim advocates are the lifeblood of our office. They are on call 24/7 and respond to crime scenes, hospitals and homes after hours. We truly work as a team to prosecute offenders and ensure that victims have a true voice in the system.

HB 2391 provides funding for one crime victim advocate in DA offices with a single prosecutor and a crime victim advocate for every four deputy DAs in offices with more than one prosecutor. This will allow us to meet our statutory and constitutionally mandated services (include victim notification and input for important stages like pre-trial release, trial preparation and sentencing).

In Union County, that would mean that we would not be faced with cutting one third of our department every budget cycle based on what grants we win, and what grants are available. Less time spent pursuing grant funding just to maintain our staffing levels would enable us to more effectively perform the core functions of the office. It would mean more resources devoted directly to serving victims and in turn, producing better prosecution results because of the outstanding ways in which victim advocates help navigate the process.

Sincerely,

/s/

Kelsie J. Davis McDaniel
Union County District Attorney