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Victim Assistance Program
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Chair Kropf and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to ask for your support for HB 2391 which would allocate \$23.5 million for County Victim Assistance Programs. In Union County 100% of the Victim Assistance Program is grant funded. There is 2.29 FTE in advocate positions, 1.0 FTE of that is competitive grant funding and the remaining 1.29 FTE is federal non-competitive funding from the Victims of Crime Act grant which has been continually declining since 2018.

The continual decline in funding and the constant pressure to find funding in other places takes away from victim services. Additionally, the increasing number of victims puts a much larger strain on advocates that provide at the least statutory and constitutional services. In 2020 Union County had 698 victims, in 2021 there was 765, and in 2022 there was 982. As you can see there are more victims needing services, and less funding each year.

Victim Advocates provide significant services throughout the criminal justice process such as access to the justice system for victims, protection of victim rights, they serve as vital partners with community-based victim service providers, and are liaisons between prosecutors and victims. Our role is key in providing victims with a voice and providing critical resources and population-specific services to meet the needs of all crime victims. Funding is no longer adequate to provide victims with the level of services that they need and deserve.

HB 2391 provides funding for one crime victim advocate in a District Attorney's Office with a single prosecutor and a crime victim advocate for every four Deputy District Attorneys in offices with more than one prosecutor. This will allow the Union County Victim Assistance Program to provide and ensure access to constitutionally mandated services that could be lifesaving.

Sincerely,

Valerie Schlichting
Union County Victim Assistance Program Director