

SUPPORT HB3582

Expand VESSA to Provide Economic Security and Safety for More Survivors/Victims of Violent Crime

Representative Robyn Gabel / Senator Robert Peters

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Financial Stability and Safety is Critical for Crime Survivors

Survivors of violent crime often need to take sudden action - with very little advance notice - to seek medical treatment, legal help, or other services. The financial pressures and subsequent losses associated with violence often extend into a survivor's work life and can affect their ability to take steps to heal from their injuries and protect themselves and their families from additional harm.

Employees affected by violent crime require supportive workplace policies and protections that reduce the threat of job loss and economic insecurity and that allow survivors to seek help.

- ➡ In Illinois, survivors who experience violent crime at higher rates – Black and Brown people, people under the age of 30, and people with incomes less than \$50,000¹ – are more likely to face intersecting forms of discrimination that increase their likelihood of facing economic instability and safety concerns.
- ➡ Workers who are paid low wages often do not have access to time off or the money needed to seek medical care, contact the appropriate authorities, access victim services, or take other actions to increase safety and wellbeing when they experience violence.
- ➡ Untreated trauma has costly consequences for the survivor, their family, and the larger community. Billions of dollars are drained from the economy when crime survivors needs go unaddressed.²

Solution: Expand Current VESSA Legislation

The **Illinois Victims' Economic Security and Safety Act (VESSA)** was enacted in 2003 and gives survivors of domestic, sexual, and gender violence and their families protections against economic insecurity, especially loss of employment. Under current law, VESSA provides unpaid, job-protected leave and reasonable accommodations to employees who are survivors of domestic, sexual, and gender violence, as well as to employees who have family or household members who are survivors.

HB3582 amends VESSA to expand the category of protection for employees who are survivors of more crimes of violence as defined by the bill, or employees who have families or household members who are victims of the expanded crimes of violence. As amended, affected employees will receive the same unpaid, job-protected leave and protections as other victims of domestic, sexual, or gender violence previously covered by VESSA.

With VESSA, survivors may take up to 12 work weeks of unpaid time off during any 12-month period (length of leave depends on the number of employees). The unpaid time off can be used to:

- ➡ seek medical treatment or counseling;
- ➡ access victim services, legal help, or attend court;
- ➡ relocate or take other actions to increase safety and address trauma.

The Act additionally prohibits employers from discriminating against VESSA-qualifying employees in terms of hiring, firing, income, promotion, harassment, and retaliation also requires that employers make various reasonable accommodations in the workplace for VESSA-qualifying employees.

With the amendments, HB3582 will:

- ➡ Extend the category of protection in the Illinois Victims' Economic Security and Safety Act (VESSA) to employees who are victims of other forms of violent crime (in addition to domestic, sexual and gender violence) to reflect the reality that all violent crime survivors need job-protected leave, economic security and safety.
- ➡ Help more survivors return to work in the wake of violence with greater economic stability and protection for affected employees, including survivors who experience violent crime at higher rates – Black and Brown people, young adults under the age of 30, and people with low incomes.
- ➡ Ensure that more employees affected by violent crime have the workplace policies and job protections they need to seek medical treatment or take other actions to increase safety and address trauma without the threat of job loss or fear of employer retaliation or discrimination.

Supporting Organizations (as of 5/13/2021)

Brighton Park Neighborhood Council
Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation
Chicago Chapter of the National Organization for Women
Chicago Survivors
Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice
Darren B. Easterling Center for Restorative Practices
Evanston Fight for Black Lives
Imani Dream Angel
Indivisible Illinois
Israel's Gifts of Hope
Lifespan

Mothers on a Mission 28
Padres Angeles
Parents for Peace and Justice
People for a Safer Society
Purpose Over Pain
She Votes Illinois
Shriver Center on Poverty Law
Stay Gold Movement
The Network

For more information, contact: **Madeline Norris**, Legislative Director, 18th District Office, (847) 424-5401 or info@robyngabel.com

1: Source: [Crime Victims' Voices: Survey of Illinois Victims' Views on Safety and Justice](#)

2: Miller, T., Cohen, M., & Wiersema, B. (1996). *Victim costs and consequences: a new look*. U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice. Retrieved from <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/victcost.pdf>