

Let's Get the Money to the Victims of Crime  
Senator Loretta Weinberg

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Today, we stand here asking that a 35-year-old testament to crime victims gets an upgrade.

An upgrade that will put money behind efforts to help those who have been battered by the hands of violent criminals or whose minds have been shaken by the loss of loved ones to the destructive forces of crime.

It was a good idea in 1971 when the Legislature and Governor Cahill decided the time had come to assess criminals for their acts of violence - to make criminals help in cleaning up the mess they'd made of the lives of their victims.

That was the good idea back when the Crime Victims Compensation Board was created - to help compensate the victims of violence with penalties paid for by the perpetrators of evil acts.

But somewhere along the line - and we're not really here today to finger blame on specific individuals - the system ran amok.

People took advantage of a good system and the Victims of Crime Compensation Board gradually became a landing spot for patronage jobs.

You don't have to be a graduate degree holder in Political Science to realize that some government jobs get taken by those with friends on the controls of government. Some very good people get those jobs, but then, again, others sometimes show up with their eye on the clock and their hands out for paychecks.

We think there's a lot of room for improving the way things operate at the Board - so much so that we can even proclaim in good conscience that the Board needs a revamp, an overhaul, yes, a re-make of considerable proportion.

It's not just about the money.

It's about changing the culture of a place to get it back to its original mission.

That's why we are calling today for doing away with the current Board makeup of full-time, paid board members who command salaries of well over a hundred thousand dollars a year and even gain tenure in their posts after ten years of service.

By abolishing the five paid board positions and replacing them with an Executive Director and a Hearing Board-Advisory Panel, coupled with additional staff reductions, New Jersey taxpayers will see nearly a million dollars in salaries and benefits freed up for helping victims of crime.

The current Chairman of the Board will become the Executive Director of the new agency until a qualified successor is appointed.

Crime victims will continue to qualify for grants of up to 25 thousand dollars, but we hope to clear the pipeline, so to speak, so the funds flow more directly to those who deserve it.

Right now, the members of our Victims of Crime Compensation Board receive higher salaries and total compensation than any other such agency in the nation.

In fact, only one other state - New York - pays full time salaries to board members. And New York pays less than we do in New Jersey.

The best proof that we can streamline this agency is the attendance records of three separate commissioners which over the last five years show that they have taken off for various reasons for annual breaks totaling seven and eight weeks and, in one case, consecutive year breaks of nearly 15 weeks, more than 13 weeks and nearly eight weeks.

The legislation we highlight today will streamline the re-vamped agency so requests for funding can be expedited and help gets to where it was intended all along.

It should be noted that efforts to improve the effectiveness of the Victims of Crime Compensation Board have been led by a former Chairman, Richard Pompelio, whose dedication to helping crime victims is unbounded.

We are here today with a blueprint for changing the system because of the devotion and energy of Rich Pompelio, a father whose life was shattered by the violent death of his son at a tender age.

Thank you, Rich Pompelio.

And thank you to all the people who have worked so hard to prepare this truly important piece of legislation.