

SUBJECT: Compensation for moving expenses for domestic violence victims

COMMITTEE: Criminal Jurisprudence — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 7 ayes — Hinojosa, Dunnam, Garcia, Nixon, Smith, Talton, Wise
0 nays
2 absent — Green, Keel

WITNESSES: For — Andy Kahan, Harris County Victim Advisory Council; Dr. Nora Jo Sherman; Sheri Sherman Rafes
Against — None

BACKGROUND: The Crime Victims' Compensation Act, enacted in 1979, established a compensation fund to reimburse victims of violent crimes for certain expenses that are not recoverable from other sources. Reimbursement can go towards expenses for medical care, counseling, funerals, child care, or judicial proceedings. Money from the fund comes primarily from court fees paid by criminal offenders. The Attorney General's Office, which administers the fund, estimates that \$67.7 million will be paid out to victims during fiscal 2000-01, while revenue will total \$129 million.

DIGEST: CSHB 3255 would allow a claimant to the Crime Victim's Compensation Fund who is a victim of domestic abuse to receive funds to pay reasonable relocation and rental expenses. It would authorize a one-time payment not to exceed \$2,000 for relocation expenses, including rental deposit, utility connections, moving expenses, as well as for transportation, lodging, and meals for out-of-state moves. A one-time payment not to exceed \$1,800 would be used for housing rental expenses.

This bill would take effect September 1, 1999.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 3255 would help victims of domestic violence who are eligible for assistance through the Crime Victim's Compensation Fund to pay for reasonable moving and relocation expenses. Domestic violence victims often

move into shelters following an incident. But when their stay is up, they may return to an abusive home situation because they have nowhere else to go. Victims have a difficult time separating from the aggressor because they are dependent for money, food, shelter, and transportation. The aggressor maintains control over the victim by controlling finances and other assets. This bill would help victims get away from their abusers and start new lives.

The amounts provided are reasonable and would save the costs to society, the health care system, and the criminal justice system of further repeated incidents of domestic violence. This bill also would provide a good alternative to the expense of building more shelters.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

The maximum compensation that victims of domestic abuse can receive is not enough to help a victim get started in a new place without a job, especially if the victim has children to support. Larger amounts of funding should be provided to give domestic victims applying to the fund a new start in life.

NOTES:

The original bill would have required a victim to be living with the alleged offender at the time of the crime, the alleged offender to be solely or partly responsible for rental payments, and the victim to have sought a court order barring the alleged offender from entering the premises.