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Office

S.B. 36
134th General Assembly

Fiscal Note & Local Impact Statement

[Click here for S.B. 36's Bill Analysis](#)

Version: As Reported by Senate Judiciary

Primary Sponsors: Sens. Manning and S. Huffman

Local Impact Statement Procedure Required: No

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Highlights

- The bill will increase the number of claims filed and the amount disbursed as reparations under the state's Victim of Crime Compensation Program, operated by the Attorney General's Office, by a minimum of \$1.8 million annually, for which the Attorney General appears to have sufficient cash at hand.
- The bill may result in a minimal annual increase in the operating expenses of the Attorney General's Crime Victim Section to manage the reparations award process.
- The bill will have no direct fiscal effect on the state's political subdivisions.

Detailed Analysis

The bill revises the eligibility standards and procedures for awarding reparations to crime victims. The Ohio Attorney General's Office handles the reparations award process as part of its responsibility to administer the state's Victims of Crime Compensation Program. The Attorney General pays for the awards with money primarily appropriated from the Reparations Fund (Fund 4020) and secondarily from the federal Crime Victim Assistance Fund (Fund 3FV0).

Eligibility for an award of reparations

Ohio's Attorney General is required to make awards of reparations for economic loss arising from criminally injurious conduct if the Attorney General is satisfied by a preponderance of the evidence that the requirements for an award of reparations have been met.

Criminal history

Under current law, a victim or claimant who was convicted of certain specified felonies or engaged in certain criminal conduct within ten years prior to the criminally injurious conduct that gave rise to their claim is not eligible to receive an award of reparations (compensation for

economic losses) under the state's Victims of Crime Compensation Program. The bill eliminates the lookback period for disqualifying criminal history.

Eliminating eligibility restrictions based on conviction status and alleged criminal activity will increase the number of successful applications and awards for victims disqualified under current law. The Attorney General's Office estimates that the number of application denials based on criminal history were 460 and 376 for FY 2019 and FY 2020, respectively. Absent the lookback period, those applications may have been eligible for compensation. There would also likely be new applications from crime victims with a criminal past that, under current law, chose not to apply due to the ten-year lookback period.

The number of additional successful applications stemming from the bill is uncertain, but LBO estimates it could be up to 500 or 600 per year. The average award is between \$2,000 and \$3,000. If 600 additional claims received an average crime victim's award of \$3,000, then the bill could create an additional \$1.8 million in disbursements. For FY 2017 through FY 2020, the year-ending cash balance for the Reparations Fund averaged around \$10 million. This suggests that the fund should have sufficient cash on hand to absorb any increase in the total amount of compensation paid out annually because of reducing the lookback period for disqualifying prior criminal convictions, as well as any administrative increase to process additional claims.

Contributory misconduct

Under current law, reparations payable to the victim and all other claimants sustaining economic loss because of injury to or the death of the victim is limited to a total of \$50,000. There are specific reasons for which an award may be reduced or a claim denied because of contributory misconduct. These include, but are not limited to: (1) the victim was convicted of a felony within ten years prior to the criminally injurious conduct that gave rise to the claim or is convicted of a felony during the pendency of the claim, or (2) there is evidence the victim engaged in an ongoing course of criminal conduct within five years of the criminally injurious conduct that is the subject of the claim. If a claim is denied based on contributory misconduct on the grounds of either of the two above-noted circumstances, the burden of proof is on the claimant to show the requirements for an award have been met. The bill eliminates this legal duty and specifies that a deceased victim's conduct cannot be used as grounds for denial of any claim that results in the victim's death.

The degree to which these changes to existing contributory conduct language will affect the number or outcome requests for reconsideration or appeals filed is unclear. However, the Attorney General anticipates a significant increase in attorney fees paid from Fund 4020, assuming an increase in appeals. The net result of changes regarding contributory misconduct is expected to be significant factoring in the potential for dependent's economic loss arising from death claims. Dependent's economic loss is essentially the work loss of the decedent, over a lifetime, paid to the decedent's dependents, which are commonly denied for contributory misconduct.

The Attorney General's Office estimates that the number of application denials based on all circumstances of contributory misconduct were 99 and 88 for FY 2019 and FY 2020, respectively. The amount of additional disbursements and other costs are generally expected to remain under the historical cash balance of the fund.

Additional types of victims

The bill includes two additional types of victims who may receive an award of reparations: (1) an immediate family member of a victim of specified criminally injurious conduct, who requires psychiatric care or counseling as a result of that conduct, and (2) a family member or immediate family member of a victim of specified criminally injurious conduct, who suffers trauma so severe that it impedes or prohibits them from participating in normal daily activities when conditions are met.¹

Under current law, an immediate family member of a victim who requires psychiatric care or counseling as a result of the same conduct described by the bill may be reimbursed for that care or counseling through the victim's reparation application for up to \$2,500 per family member, not exceeding \$7,500 total.² Designation as a victim allows these family members to obtain a reparation award of up to \$5,000 for care or counseling. This designation for the second type of victim allows those persons, suffering severe trauma, to receive a reparations award of up to \$15,000 to cover work loss and care or counseling.

According to the Attorney General's Office, these provisions will likely have very little fiscal impact, as it is rare for compensation for care or counseling to reach the current \$7,500 cap. Additionally, the Office expects a small number of additional persons each year would qualify as a victim under the expanded definition. The designation currently exists in case law and referred to as a "victim in their own right" (VIOR). It is apparently difficult to meet the eligibility criteria established in case law and only two or three VIORs receive reparations each year. Defining this type of victim in statute may make it easier to be granted such a reparations award. The overall annual number is still likely to remain small, and the fiscal impact would be minimal annually.

Attorney General's Crime Victim Section

The bill: (1) increases the number of claims for an award of reparations that will be filed annually with the Attorney General, as well as the number of award decision appeals, and (2) modifies the information that the Attorney General is required to include in the finding of fact and decision when making or denying of award of reparations. The result may be a minimal annual increase in the operating expenses of the Attorney General's Crime Victim Section that manages the reparations award process.

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¹ Immediate family member is an individual who resided in the same permanent household as a victim at the time of the criminally injurious conduct and who is related to the victim by affinity (marriage) or consanguinity (shared ancestry). Family member is an individual who is related to a victim by affinity or consanguinity.

² Reparations payable to a victim and to all other claimants is capped at \$50,000 in the aggregate.