



H.558 Victim's Compensation Board
Chris Fenno, Executive Director
Senate Government Operations Committee – May 19, 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.558 regarding the Victim's Compensation Board.

The Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services is a small state agency. We provide victim's compensation and restitution for crime victims, support the Advocate program in State Attorney's Offices, as well as grants for victim services.

CCVS is unique compared to many agencies in other states in that we are a stand-alone state agency. The Victim Compensation Board consists of 5 members appointed by the Governor. The board is required to have a doctor, lawyer, and victim along with 2 at-large members.

I am testifying today in support of H.558. We believe that the Victim Compensation Board should be exempt from the open meeting laws. We would still abide by public records requests.

We hold our meetings in a confidential location, in part, as it is our meeting room for the Center. Because of the open meetings law, we have had to develop awkward, confusing, and sometimes unsafe practices.

- We hold our meetings in a confidential location, but we need to keep the door unlocked, to comply with the open meetings law.
- When we review compensation cases, the board has to go into executive session to look at the victim's confidential medical records. There is no place for anyone else to wait, except the parking lot. The board and staff are concerned about their safety.
- We have to use numbers and letters to protect the identity of the victim, because the meetings are open, which is often confusing and challenging.

Because the Center and Board deal with both compensation claims and collect restitution, there are sometimes threats made against staff. Our buildings are not open to the public and require prior approval for people to come to the buildings – except when the Board meets and the Center has to post the location, time, and agenda for the public. Then there is a location, time, and the door is unlocked. There are threats made against staff multiple times during the year. The Center has policies and procedures for dealing with these threats but it does mean that staff are on alert normally and along with the Board, when the public meetings are held.

For safety and because of the confidential nature of the board's work, we request your consideration of exemption from the open meeting laws for the Compensation Board.

Thank you.