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Governor Blagojevich signs laws strengthening protections for victims of domestic violence and hate crimes

Laws improve tracking of repeat domestic offenders and allow victims of hate crimes to receive compensation under the Crime Victims Compensation Act

SPRINGFIELD – Governor Rod R. Blagojevich today signed two new laws to help strengthen protections for victims of domestic violence and increase compensation for victims of hate crimes in order to reduce the financial, mental, and physical burden faced by survivors of violent crimes.

“The effects of crime on a victim can extend well beyond the crime itself,” said Governor Blagojevich. “These laws are in place to protect people from being victimized again.”

House Bill 4649, sponsored by Rep. Jack Franks (D-Woodstock) and Sen. John Millner (R-St. Charles), will protect victims of domestic violence by creating a checklist for judges to consider prior to setting bail for a domestic violence offender that includes whether the defendant has a history of domestic violence or other violent acts; the defendant’s mental health; the defendant’s history of violating court orders, and whether the defendant is a threat to any other person. Previously, judges often had to set bond for a defendant without many details about the defendant’s criminal history. The bill also creates a paper trail to help prosecutors establish a record for domestic violence offenders.

“This is an important bill that advances our work in attempting to break the cycle of violence at home. It will allow a cooling-off period for the abusers, which will help protect survivors, and require judges to consider the defendant's record before setting bail,” said Rep. Franks.

“As a former Suburban Police Chief I can’t stress enough how important this law is,” Sen. Millner said. “The added tools this will give law enforcement will prove invaluable when it comes to protecting victims from further abuse, which often times are children, and giving judges the information they need to make the right decision about the level of bail that’s appropriate for that specific offender.”

House Bill 4134, sponsored by Rep. Sara Feigenholtz (D-Chicago) and Sen. John Cullerton (D-Chicago), adds hate crimes to the list of crimes covered under the Crime Victims Compensation Act. The bill also requires victim compensation to include

transportation expenses to and from medical and treatment facilities, loss of tuition paid to attend grammar school or high school when the victim had been enrolled as a student prior to the injury, and loss of tuition paid to attend college or graduate school when the victim had been enrolled as a day or night student prior to the injury and is no longer able to attend that school as a result of the crime. The bill also expands the definition of victim to include the parents of a person of any age.

"Extending compensation to victims of violent crimes, including hate crimes, is simply the right thing to do," said Rep. Feigenholtz. "Cases that have come before the Crime Victims Services Division have demonstrated the need to make this statute more all-encompassing."

"The Crime Victim Compensation Act was established by the Illinois General Assembly in 1973 with the primary goal of helping to reduce the financial burden imposed on victims of violent crime and their families. Extending the provision to include 'hate crimes' under crimes of violence is a step forward in protecting innocent citizens," said Senator John Cullerton.

Both pieces of legislation are effective January 1, 2007.