

Date of Hearing: April 8, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 1716 (Stefani) – As Introduced February 4, 2026

Policy Committee: Public Safety

Vote: 9 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill authorizes the California Victim Compensation Board (CalVCB) to reimburse up to \$10,000 in tuition for victims of sexual assault or violence at an educational institution.

FISCAL EFFECT:

CalVCB estimates that AB 1716's new category of reimbursement will create increased victim compensation payments ranging from \$1.65 million to \$3.3 million annually. Cost projections are based on the estimated number of students impacted and average tuition at 10 UC schools, 23 California State University (CSU) schools, 225 private colleges and 115 community colleges, as well as 160,000 California residents attending schools out of state.

In addition to direct payments, CalVCB anticipates increased administrative workload associated with processing an estimated 550 to 1,100 additional claims per year. This increased workload would require approximately two additional staff positions, at an estimated ongoing cost of \$312,000 annually. This bill would also necessitate modifications to CalVCB's claim processing system (CaRES), resulting in a one-time cost of approximately \$90,000. Multiple unknown factors may increase these amounts, such as claims for tuition from private high schools or vocational schools and claims for more than one academic term.

Funding for the CalVCB comes from restitution fines and penalty assessments paid by criminal offenders, General Fund money, and federal matching funds. CalVCB's Restitution Fund has an ongoing structural insolvency. It requires periodic transfers from the General Fund (GF) for CalVCB to continue to meet its obligations and provide victims the compensation that is guaranteed by statute. The Legislative Analyst's Office recently warned of GF structural deficits of around \$35 billion per year in the 2027-28 fiscal year and ongoing.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** Sexual assault survivors often face academic disruption and unexpected financial hardship, such as withdrawing from classes or repeating coursework. Bill proponents contend that allowing CalVCB reimbursement would help victims remain enrolled and continue their education.
- 2) **Background.** The California Victim Compensation Program administers the state's victim compensation program, which provides financial reimbursement to eligible victims of violent crime for specified crime-related expenses. Covered expenses include, among other things,

medical and dental care, mental health counseling, wage or income loss, relocation, and funeral expenses. Compensation is limited to expenses not reimbursable from any other source, as the program is intended to be the “payor of last resort.”

Funding for victim compensation is provided through the Restitution Fund, which historically received revenue from restitution fines and penalty assessments imposed on criminal offenders, as well as federal funds and GF support. In recent years, however, federal funding and revenues from fines and fees have declined significantly due to policy changes reducing or eliminating various criminal justice assessments. As a result, the Restitution Fund has become increasingly reliant on GF appropriations to maintain solvency.

The Restitution Fund has experienced a structural imbalance for over a decade, with expenditures exceeding revenues since at least the 2015-16 fiscal year. To maintain program operations, the state has provided periodic GF backfills. AB 160 (Committee on Budget, Chapter 771, Statute 2022) established a conditional framework under which expanded or fully-funded victim compensation benefits would become operative if specified fiscal conditions were met—namely, sufficient GF resources and an appropriation to backfill the Restitution Fund. Those conditions have not occurred.

The Restitution Fund continues to lack sufficient dedicated revenue to support program obligations on its own. It does not function as a fully self-sustaining restitution-based fund, but rather as a program operationally dependent on ongoing discretionary GF appropriations. In other words, CalVCB’s ability to pay claims, including the ones that would be created by this bill, is effectively constrained by the level of GF support.

The Governor’s proposed 2026-27 budget allocates \$546.8 million for victim services including \$303 million to backfill federal Victims of Crime Act Supplemental Funding. The total estimated budget of Cal VCB, according to the Comparative Statement of Expenditures, including any federal funds in 2026-27, is approximately \$49 million for state operations and \$42 million in local assistance. The total estimated Victim Compensation Fund balance for 2026-27 is approximately \$47 million—an approximate \$44 million gap. Based on the requirements of AB 160, if this bill were to be enacted, it will only go into effect if it receives a GF allocation.

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