

## **Introduction**

[Music]

**Kirsten Barber:** You're listening to the NCDPS Safety Scoop, a podcast that dives into the stories of the people, programs and resources within the North Carolina Department of Public Safety. Each episode, we'll give you the scoop from department personnel on how NCDPS enhances the safety of the people of North Carolina.

[Music]

[Pause]

## **Season 4 Episode 3**

**Kirsten:** In this Safety Scoop episode, we are getting to know more about a DPS section not yet featured in our podcast. In this two-episode series, we will be talking about the programs available through the Office of Victim Compensation Services in the state of North Carolina. Today, we're going to dive into something incredibly important and valuable to the people of North Carolina: the Victim Compensation Program. This program helps those who have been impacted by violent crime to recover financially during a very challenging time in their lives. Whether you're an innocent victim of crime yourself or know

someone who could benefit, this episode will guide you through the process, eligibility and support that's available.

To talk more about this program with us we have Felisa, who works with the Office of Victim Compensation Services. She started working with VCS in January of 2024. She is a proud MBA and liberal art degree graduate of Shaw University. Felisa retired from the Durham Police Department in 2021 where she had the privilege of working alongside a dedicated group of victim service advocates. When the opportunity to join Victim Compensation Services arose in 2024, she felt that her prior law enforcement experience would be perfect—would be a perfect fit for the position. Thank you for being part of the Safety Scoop.

**Felisa Frances:** Thank you, Kirsten, for that introduction to our program. I am grateful for this opportunity. Working with the Office of Victims' Compensation has been a rewarding experience in the past year and as I continue to help victims in this new and impactful way. And one way we're doing this is by speaking with you today about what we do and who we are. So, thank you.

**Kirsten:** Well, let's get into it. What exactly is the Victim Compensation Program, and how does it work in North Carolina?

**Felisa:** That's a good question and thank you for asking. Since 1987, the Office of Victim Compensation Services was founded to assist victims and their families with financial support for things like medical care, counseling, lost wages and funeral

expenses. Our agency is funded through state appropriation and federal reimbursement funds. This is how our office aids victims after they have been impacted by criminal violence. Also, in 2018, North Carolina passed Marsy's Law, ensuring victims/survivors have rights in the criminal justice system, including the right to receive notice of court proceedings and to be heard in cases involving the accused.

**Kirsten:** Now, in going over that, our audience might be wondering, are they eligible for these services? Let's talk about that. How does someone know if they're eligible for this type of compensation?

**Felisa:** So, what makes a person eligible for victim compensation services in North Carolina? The person who is seeking help has to meet certain criteria. First, you must be an innocent victim who has been affected by a crime like assault, robbery, motor vehicle collision, DWI—that's DWI/DUI-related, pedestrian hit-and-run or homicide. The crime must occur in North Carolina. However, the victim does not need to be a resident of North Carolina. I want to emphasize again that the crime must occur in North Carolina, but the victim does not have to be a resident of North Carolina.

Another thing is that it's very important that you, uh, make law enforcement aware within 72 hours. We also want our victims to cooperate with the investigation. That is very key because that ensures that this process will be seamless and to avoid any delays. Claimants and victims must not be involved in

any illegal activity at the time of the crime because the program benefits those who have suffered because of someone else's criminal actions and not their own.

And finally, my team and I understand that it is sometimes people who are, eh, who have been affected by crime, they're trying to connect with our services, they've gone through something very unexpected and traumatic and, while these steps seem very technical, they are a vital part for ensuring victims receive the compensation that they are entitled to under this program. But my team and I are here to help claimants and victims through the process. We want people to know they are not alone. They are not alone. They are *not alone*.

**Kirsten:**

Thank you for going through those steps and just for making it clear for those listening, the eligibility process. So, once you, um, have determined that you are eligible for this program, how does the process work, or how do people get started?

**Felisa:**

We want to make this process as seamless as possible, so it does require you gathering some paperwork. The first thing that we want our victims to do is to acquire our application, and then once they acquire our application, fill it out, and then they must sign it. And then along with the application, they need to submit an itemized bill, like a counseling statement, a hospital bill, a funeral bill. Then they need to get a re—a police report or an accident report or a

warrant because what these things do is shows that something happened to the victim.

Once they gather all that information and... 'Cause the application and the itemized bill is needed in order for the application to be submitted. The police report and the warrants are just assisting additional information. When you get the information, you can mail that information into our office, and you can acquire our application on our website: [ncdps.gov/4victims](http://ncdps.gov/4victims). If anybody has any problems or concerns about the process, they can call our office at 919-733-7974, and we'll be happy to help them walk through the process.

And finally, if you don't know if you qualify, please go ahead and reach out to us. And like I said before, we are here to help and connect you with the resources you need. Our services are free as well as confidential. I want to repeat that: our services are free as well as confidential. So, let us help you with your recovery.

**Kirsten:**

So, after this initial startup process, what comes next, um, for those who are going through this program?

**Felisa:** Well, uh, first of all, I want to say that claimants and victims, there is a process to it, and there are some steps to it. So, after you have submitted your application to our program, we're going to review the case, and then we're going to determine what expenses qualify for compensation. And those expenses are vast. They can be medical bills. They can be lost wages. So, it's a

variety of things that we will look at. And then once you submit your application, it will go through an intake process. We have intake administrators who will then gather all the information that's needed. They will date stamp it. They will enter into our data management system, which will generate a—what we call a claim number. We also want to encourage our victims and claimants that once they receive that number, if they ever need to call our office at any time, that that number is vital to helping us locate their case.

Once that has happened, the case is then, uh, handed off to an investigator such as myself. We will then look at all that information. We will also make sure that there's no missing information, and if it is, we will work with the intake, uh, administrators to make sure that all the information that we need to conduct the investigation moves along in a seamless way. We will then contact our law enforcement partners, the District Attorney's Office and sometimes even the victim because we have to verify the information.

Once we verify the information, it will then move into the financial review stage, and that's when our examiners will review all the information that has been submitted. This process does take about three to six months on average, so thus we urge our claimants and our victims when they are submitting this information to please make sure that you submit a medical bill along with the application because that is needed to make sure that the process moves along seamlessly.

**Kirsten:**

Wow, so, three to six months! Um, but it seems like every part of this is very thorough. So, it's—it's interesting how every step from document gathering to verifying the details with law enforcement ensures everything is handled accurately before it moves forward.

**Felisa:**

Yes, this process is a very thorough process because our agency receives so many cases. For example, we receive about 350 applications a month from all over the state. So, we handle all 100 counties. We also answer about 2,400 calls per month, and in 2024, about 2,449 applications were approved. And in that same year, \$9.8 million was distributed.

So, like I said before, once an application has been reviewed and approved, compensation payments are made directly, paid directly to a variety of people. It's either gonna be the service provider, the vendor. Also, we will reimburse out-of-pocket expenses to—directly to a victim or a claimant because we want to—to ensure that funds go exactly where they are needed, whether it's a hospital, a medical professional, a therapist or even a funeral home.

I also want to add that victims who are eligible for compensation—or can receive compensation for a maximum up to \$45,000 of—of medical—in medical expenses and a maximum of \$10,000 in funeral expenses. So, we want to encourage our medical professionals, our funeral home directors, our victim's assistants, witness advocates who work at the District Attorney's Offices across the state

and our law enforcement partners to encourage victims to fill out the application.

**Kirsten:** So, is there a deadline for these applications to be submitted?

**Felisa:** Yes, there is a deadline. Claims must be filed within two years of the crime or the injury. So, if you know anyone who is eligible, and once a victim is at a place where they can move forward... Because we do understand in our office that being a victim of crime is very traumatic, but we also want you to understand that time is also of the essence. So, we encourage you to apply for compensation because we don't want anybody to miss out on the chance to receive help. We provide resources to those because we want to help people to get their lives back together.

**Kirsten:** And so, you talked about the variety of expenses, uh, for those who are applying. So, what expenses are eligible under this program?

**Felisa:** Things that we consider are medical bills, counseling statements, dental expenses, lost wages, domestic violence household support, burial and funeral expenses and crime scene cleanup. And the one thing I want to say about crime scene cleanup: we're often asked about do we have a list. We don't have a list. We just ask anyone that—who is looking for that type of assistance is to make sure that they get the project done by someone who's a certified biohazardous company and then to ensure that they will submit that information through a



receipt or a statement. We also deal with mental health counseling as well. We want to let people know that, of course, after that you're dealing with a traumatic experience, you may have ongoing counseling, so we do support them in—in that way, as well. I want to say that and mention the fact that we are also supported by the North Carolina Crime Victims' Compensation Commission. They govern our office by helping us evaluate requests for reimbursement submitted by eligible crime victims and their families, and we meet with them quarterly.

**Kirsten:** So, you mentioned crime scene cleanup, so does that also cover property damage?

**Felisa:** We sometimes receive claims for property damage, replacement of property, court fees, expenses, pain and suffering, utilities, mortgage, rent and travel expenses. These are not covered by our program. We don't want our victims to be discouraged, and we don't want anyone to miss out on compensation, so if you don't understand what we cover, just submit your application and allow us to figure that out for you.

**Kirsten:** For those who are filing an application, do they also need to file a claim with their insurance company?

**Felisa:** Yes. Our program is the payer of last resort, meaning victims should first submit expenses to their insurance companies. Our program helps after the insurance

company has paid for their part. So, in other words, sometimes you may have a balance, and then that's when we step in. An example of those things is some things like medical expenses, like your reimburse—things you want to be reimbursed for. It's also things like your copays and your deductibles. So, these are some of the things.

**Kirsten:** Thank you for explaining that. So, how can someone who is an innocent victim of crime get started?

**Felisa:** We understand that victims are going through a trying and difficult time, and we want them to reach out for—to us for help because we know that it's very overwhelming. If you or your loved ones have been a victim of crime in North Carolina, first the things that we want you to do is please report it to the authorities. Then, we would like for you to go to our—our website which is [ncdps.gov/4victims](https://ncdps.gov/4victims) and download our application and fill it out. And then, you can also give us a call at 919-733-7974. We are available. We're happy to guide you through the process, step by step. We have a dedicated staff of individuals who is willing to help any and everyone who needs help. Kristen [sic], also, I want to thank you once again for giving us this platform today because you're going to allow us to let people know who we are and what we are about, and what we are about is about helping the victims of North Carolina.

**Kirsten:**

Thank you so much for sharing about the Office of Victim Compensation Services. Before we wrap up, let's quickly go over a few key takeaways from today's episode.

1. The Victim Compensation Program is available for individuals who have suffered due to violent crime in North Carolina.
2. Eligibility depends on reporting the crime, cooperating with the investigation and being an innocent victim of crime.

Victims of violent crime who answer yes to the following questions may be eligible for financial assistance. Did the crime occur in North Carolina? Was it reported within 72 hours? Did the victim sustain a direct injury, physical or psychological? Did the victim lose income or face expenses for eligible services in the first year after the crime? Was the victim *not* committing a crime at the time of injury?

3. The application process is straightforward, but don't forget to file within two years of the crime.
4. The Victim Compensation Program can cover things like medical expenses, lost wages, counseling costs and funeral expenses.

That's all for today's episode. If you know someone who might benefit from the Victim Compensation Program, please share this episode with them. And remember, if you need help navigating the process, don't hesitate to reach out to the Office of Victim Compensation Services at 919-733-7974 or visit their website [ncdps.gov/4victims](https://ncdps.gov/4victims). We will hear more about the two programs available through the Office of Victim Compensation Services and their upcoming online portal in a future episode.

## **Conclusion**

[Music]

**Kirsten:** This is the Safety Scoop, a podcast written, produced and edited by the NCDPS communications team. The mission of the North Carolina Department of Public Safety is to safeguard and preserve the lives and property of the people of North Carolina through preparation, prevention and protection with integrity and honor. Follow the department on social media for a closer look at ongoing initiatives and resources. We're on Facebook, X and Instagram at NC Public Safety. If you enjoyed today's episode, be sure to subscribe to the Safety Scoop on your favorite podcast app. I'm your host, Kirsten Barber. Thanks for listening.

[Music]