



IMPROVING ACCESS TO COMPENSATION FOR HUMAN TRAFFICKING SURVIVORS

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OVERVIEW

California’s Assembly Bill 629 (AB 629), enacted in January 2020, allows human trafficking survivors to access benefits for lost income through the California Victim Compensation Board (CalVCB). With this law in effect, survivors can now qualify for up to \$20,000 in income loss paid through CalVCB.¹

Despite this legislative advancement to update CalVCB’s regulations and streamline the process to access compensation, survivors still face barriers to receive the assistance they desperately need. To enhance access to income loss under AB 629 for human trafficking survivors, CalVCB should adopt strategic recommendations aimed at increasing awareness and providing targeted support.

KEY ISSUES

1. INSUFFICIENT OUTREACH AND AWARENESS

In 2023, CalVCB approved 176 applications for income loss to human trafficking survivors and provided nearly \$3 million in compensation (Table 1). While this represents an increase from the 53 applicants who received income loss during the first year the bill was enacted, this points to a large disparity when comparing the number of human trafficking survivors in the state who can be eligible to receive this benefit.

According to data reported by the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES), more than 16,000 survivors received help through community-based organizations funded by the Human Trafficking Victim Assistance (HV) Program between 2019 to 2023 (Table 2). This suggests that over 90% of potential applicants remain unaware of the existence of the compensation available through CalVCB, highlighting a critical change to address barriers in accessing support, lack of awareness, or limitations in the current system designed to help them.

Additionally, even when survivors are filing an application with CalVCB, they do not always have the knowledge of all the benefits that can be accessed through the program and therefore not receiving the maximum reimbursement that they can receive for crime-related expenses, such as help with medical bills, mental health, and money for relocation. Currently, CalVCB can reimburse up to \$70,000 for each applicant for expenses that resulted from a crime, but many don’t know how to receive these benefits.

CalVCB: Number of Human Trafficking Survivors Approved for Income Loss Benefits (Table 1)

CALENDAR YEAR	APPROVED
2024	299
2023	176
2022	329
2021	208
2020	53
TOTAL	1,065

CalOES Human Trafficking Victim Assistance (HV) Program (2019-2023)² (Table 2)

PERFORMANCE PERIOD	TOTAL
2022-2023	2099
2021-2022	5930
2020-2021	4625
2019-2020	4246
TOTAL	16,900

2. INEFFICIENCY IN DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES

In FY 2023-2024, CalVCB appropriation was \$201.7 million, with a budget of \$155 million allocated for *Victim Compensation*.³ However only \$47.3 million of this money was provided in total benefits for survivors of all crimes during that same year. This suggests inefficiencies in how resources are distributed, resulting in inadequate funding for specific services, such as mental health support and relocation assistance, leaving many victims without the comprehensive assistance they need. For example,

¹ [AB 629 SMITH - Human Trafficking.pdf \(ca.gov\)](#)

² [CalOES Handbooks, Reports, and Publications](#)

³ [CalVCB Annual Report 2023-2024](#)



only \$15,000 in relocation assistance and \$30,000 in mental health coverage was provided to survivors of human trafficking in 2023.⁴

3. DISPARITIES IN ACCESS

According to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), Mexico, the Philippines, India, Honduras, Guatemala and Thailand comprise the top six countries of birth for person who apply for T-Nonimmigrant Status, generally known as T-Visas, an immigration status granted to persons who have experienced severe forms of trafficking and have cooperated with law enforcement in the investigation and prosecution of the crime. Persons born in these six countries account for 70% of all T-visa applicants.⁵ USCIS statistics also show that California represents the state with the greatest number of applicants for T-Visas. Additionally, California elections require voting materials to be printed in alternative languages where 10,000 or 5% of the population are members of a single language minority group. In California, across all counties, these groups are Cambodian, Chinese, Korean, Hispanic, Filipino and Vietnamese.⁶ While this information is well-documented, CalVCB does not provide outreach material about AB 629 in other languages. This highlights the need for culturally competent services, outreach materials and clear guidelines tailored to the unique challenges faced by diverse communities.

Furthermore, the application process can often be complicated by complex forms and requirements to provide detailed information about their experiences, which can be overwhelming for individuals already coping with trauma. For marginalized communities, this process can be particularly daunting due to language barriers, cultural differences, or distrust of authorities. As such, survivors need guidance and assistance from case managers or attorneys who can help them navigate the application process. However, online applications are only accessible to survivors who are self-represented or those applying with assistance from advocates through the prosecutor's office. Online systems must be updated to give survivors the choice to receive assistance from

community-based organizations or legal service providers, such as attorneys, social workers, and case managers who can help to gather documentation and submit applications through the portal on the program's website. Currently, these providers are forced to file applications by mail. Expanding access to other representatives could improve participation rates among survivors from underrepresented communities who do not come in contact with the prosecutor's office and other law enforcement agencies.

In addition, the online application has not fully reflected the changes implemented by AB 629 to broaden the requirement and acceptable forms of evidence for human trafficking survivors. There are also no clear guidelines on the online application forms about what constitutes acceptable evidence for income loss claims. For example, Human Trafficking is not listed in the drop-down menu as the type of crime and survivors are still required to describe their injuries, whether these were physical and/or emotional when human trafficking itself is considered an injury under current regulations. Furthermore, survivors are required to name their employer and enter their contact information if requesting income loss. For human trafficking survivors, this information is no longer required. In fact, their employers are their traffickers and many fear retaliation from disclosing this information. Thus, updating the online form to correspond with key issues unique to trafficking survivors applying for income loss benefits may decrease survivor's fear of applying and enable them to complete an application if they choose to apply on their own.

4. DEFFICIENCY IN FEEDBACK MECHANISM

Feedback is essential for understanding the needs of crime victims and improving service delivery. However, CalVCB lacks an efficient process for collecting feedback from survivors and service providers. Without an effective system in place to gather information and implement changes based on feedback, the program may fail to adapt to the evolving needs of survivors.

⁴ [CalVCB News and Updates](#)

⁵ [Characteristics of T Non-immigrant Status \(T Visa\) Applicants Fact Sheet](#)

⁶ [Language Requirements for Election Materials](#)



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. ENHANCED OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

- **Targeted Training and Awareness:** Implement campaigns specifically aimed to assist trafficking

survivors, specifically on AB 629 benefits utilizing community organizations, social media platforms, and local radio and television stations to spread information. This should include distributing materials and providing specialized training to service providers funded by CalOES.

- **Multilingual Materials:** Provide information about AB 629 in multiple languages using culturally sensitive materials to reflect the diverse linguistic backgrounds of survivors in California and better engage underrepresented communities. At minimum, languages should reflect the top countries identified by USCIS for T-Visa Applicants and the language access guidelines required under CA election laws: Spanish, Thai, Tagalog, Hindi, and Chinese. This includes updating information on the CalVCB website about income loss and a downloadable fact sheet about AB 629.
- **Online Forms:** Ensure that the online application responds to the unique experience of human trafficking survivors by incorporating the eligibility expanded under AB 629.
- **Expand Access:** Provide access to community-based organizations to create online accounts and assist survivors to file applications through the program’s portal.

2. STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIP WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

- **Collaborate with Community-Based Organizations:** Partner with organizations, such as those funded by CalOES, to create a seamless referral system. These organizations can help survivors access compensation through CalVCB and assist with documentation to maximize the support they can receive from the program.

- **Workshops and Information Sessions:** Conduct regular workshops in collaboration with CalOES to train the 31 community-based organizations funded under their human trafficking victim assistance program about AB 629 and other benefits available through CalVCB.
- **Train First Responders:** Provide ongoing training for community partners, advocates, law enforcement, and healthcare professionals on AB 629 to ensure they are knowledgeable about the eligibility criteria, the application process and referrals for assistance unique to human trafficking survivors

3. FEEDBACK MECHANISMS

- **Collect Feedback:** Implement an effective process to gather insight and identify barriers for accessing benefits. This can include regular surveys or focus groups with human trafficking survivors and service providers to gather information about their experience with the program.
- **Adapt Program Based on Input:** Use feedback to continuously refine and improve the process and support offered by CalVCB.

Despite the provisions of AB 629, numerous barriers prevent victims of trafficking from applying for income loss benefits. By implementing these recommendations, CalVCB can significantly enhance access to benefits for human trafficking survivors, helping them recover and rebuild their lives.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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ABOUT SJI

The Sunita Jain Anti-Trafficking Initiative (“SJI”) is an evidence-based, community-informed think tank that intentionally fills gaps in human trafficking through an intersectional framework that fosters systemic change and progressive policy innovations.