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H.B. 396
136th General Assembly

Bill Analysis

Version: As Introduced

Primary Sponsor: Rep. Willis

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SUMMARY

- Expands eligibility for the Address Confidentiality Program operated by the Secretary of State for certain crime victims and their household members.
- Adds a victim of a crime that caused serious physical harm or death, a victim of a crime in which the victim was threatened with a deadly weapon, and a household member of such a victim to the list of eligible persons.
- Allows an employee or volunteer at an agency or organization that serves household members of crime victims, in addition to crime victims themselves, to be certified as an application assistant under the program.

DETAILED ANALYSIS

Background on the Address Confidentiality Program

The Secretary of State operates the Address Confidentiality Program, also known as Safe at Home. The program is designed to help certain crime victims and their household members shield their addresses and other personal information from disclosure as public records in order to protect them from further harm by an abuser or other person.

A program participant is assigned a substitute address – a post office box that leads to the Secretary’s office – that the person may use for nearly all purposes, and the Secretary’s office then forwards mail to the person’s real address on a daily basis. The program also provides a way for a participant to register to vote and vote by mail without revealing the participant’s home address, precinct, or county to the public. And, the law allows a participant who purchases real

property to file a real property confidentiality notice with county officials in order to keep the participant's name confidential in connection with publicly available property records.¹

Eligible crime victims

The bill expands the list of crimes that make a victim and the victim's household members eligible to participate in the Address Confidentiality Program to include (1) any crime that caused serious physical harm or death to the victim and (2) any crime in which the victim was threatened with a deadly weapon. Currently, the covered offenses are domestic violence, menacing by stalking, human trafficking, trafficking in persons, rape, and sexual battery.

Under continuing law, when applying to enter the program, an applicant must attest that the applicant fears for the safety of the applicant or a member of the applicant's household because the applicant or household member is a victim of a listed crime. A parent or guardian also may apply on behalf of a minor child or protected adult who is a victim or lives with a victim. Knowingly making a false attestation on the application is a first degree misdemeanor. The law does not require that the crime have been reported to the police or that any person have been charged with or convicted of the crime.

In other words, a person may become a program participant on the basis that the person is a crime victim or on the basis that the person's household member is a crime victim, if there is a safety concern for the victim, the household member, or both. Because the bill expands the eligible crime victims to include those who have been killed, the bill also allows a surviving household member to participate in the program even though the victim is not a participant.²

Application assistants

Continuing law requires any person who applies to enter the Address Confidentiality Program to be assisted by an application assistant who has received training and certification from the Secretary. An application assistant must be an employee or volunteer at an agency or organization that serves victims of the listed crimes. The bill changes this definition by incorporating the additional crimes discussed above. The bill also allows an employee or volunteer at an agency or organization that serves *household members* of victims to serve as an application assistant – for example, an agency that offers counseling to the families of murder victims.³

HISTORY

Action	Date
Introduced	07-21-25

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¹ R.C. 111.41 through 111.99.

² R.C. 111.42 and 111.99.

³ R.C. 111.41.