



Representative Beth Kerttula

House Minority Leader

Sponsor Statement

House Bill 52

"An Act authorizing psychological counseling for jurors serving in criminal trials who are traumatized by graphic evidence or testimony."

The jury system is a fundamental component of the American legal system. Jurors are asked to carry out a civic duty, yet there is the possibility of experiencing excessive levels of stress and no support is offered to help jurors cope with normal reactions to abnormal events, at its worse resembling a milder version of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Categorized as secondary trauma, jurors become traumatized through the traumatic experience of victims.

House Bill 52 would allow judges to offer 10 hours of post-trial group counseling to a juror who serves in a criminal trial involving extraordinarily graphic, gruesome, or emotional evidence or testimony. This bill would not apply to every juror in every case. Counseling sessions are necessary in only a small percentage of trials but are nonetheless highly valuable when needed.

The public's impression of the administration of justice is largely based on jury service. Offering counseling to jurors will ensure that care is taken of citizens' welfare, while also enhancing positive public attitudes toward jury service. As the government compels citizens to report for jury duty, it should minimize the burden it places on jurors. With public trust and confidence as a fundamental goal of courts nationwide, judges, court administrators and court staff must be concerned with the juror experience and the effect of the experience upon those called to serve. Jurors are unprepared for some consequences and courts do not currently provide any assistance in finding help from mental health professionals. In order to protect the integrity of the legal system I think courts are obligated to help improve the jury experience, including addressing juror stress. Proper counseling helps people cope with their normal reactions to abnormal events and provides tools to adapt to those reactions. I greatly appreciate your support of House Bill 52.