



OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
STATE OF ILLINOIS

KWAME RAOUL
ATTORNEY GENERAL

October 31, 2021

RE: Crime Victim and Witness Notification Advisory Committee (AVN Committee)

Dear Honorable Members of the Illinois General Assembly:

The Crime Victim and Witness Notification Advisory Committee (AVN Committee) was created in 1999 to assist the Office of the Illinois Attorney General in the implementation of Automated Victim Notification System (IL-VINE system). [725 ILCS 120/8.5 (g)].

The AVN Committee is charged with evaluating the operation of the system and reporting its activities and status to the General Assembly each year. As Chair of the AVN Committee, I am pleased to provide you with this update on the operation and enhancement of the IL-VINE system. In the face of the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, our office continues to provide vital services to the State of Illinois, including the operation and improvement of the IL-VINE system.

IL- VINE System Basics

The IL-VINE system provides information about changes in an offender's custodial status and court case status. Victims, witnesses, family members, law enforcement officers, probation officers, and interested members of the public can request bilingual (English/Spanish) telephone, email, or text notifications. The service is free to users and is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The IL-VINE system is a critical element in ensuring that law enforcement officials, the Department of Corrections, and prosecutors fulfill their constitutional and statutory mandates to notify victims of changes in an offender's custodial status and upcoming court dates. [See Article I, section 8.1 (a) of the Illinois Constitution, delineating the rights of crime victims, and the implementation legislation contained in the Rights of Crime Victims and Witnesses Act. [725 ILCS 120/4 and 4.5]. Law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and victim advocates are given, upon request, special access to the system, affording them the opportunity to further assist victims.

The IL-VINE system provides these valuable notifications via a computer interface with county jail booking systems, the Illinois Department of Corrections, circuit court clerks, and selected Department of Mental Health facilities throughout the state. The IL-VINE system also receives information about sex offenders through an interface with a vendor that receives data from law enforcement agencies registering sex offenders. The IL-VINE system transfers information from these sources to a centralized communication center, which in turn, generates timely telephone, email or text message updates to any individual who is a registered user of the system.

Presently there are 89 jails, 97 court systems, the Illinois Department of Corrections, and seven facilities in the Illinois Department of Mental Health, participating in IL-VINE.

The Illinois Department of Mental Health is responsible for providing notifications related to offenders who have been found not guilty by reason of insanity or who have been found to be sexually violent or sexually dangerous persons. The notifications mandated by the Rights of Crime Victims and Witnesses Act [725 ILCS 120/4.5(d)(2)] include notices that the offenders in the Illinois Department of Mental Health custody have been released on and returned from an off-grounds pass and notice when the offender is conditionally released, dies, or escapes. IDMH notifications are provided only to victims as specified by statute. County Sheriffs are required by the Sex Offender Community Notification Act to provide information to victims of registered sex offenders. These notifications relate to changes in the sex offender's residence and employment and whether the offender fails to re-register with the appropriate law enforcement agency. [730 ILCS 152/120(a)].

The registration process for the IL-VINE system is relatively simple. Victims, witnesses and other interested parties call a toll-free number: 1-866-5-NOTIFY (1-866-566-8439), (TTY-I-877-502-2423) or register online at www.vinelink.com (commonly referred to as "VINELink"). A mobile phone application (VINEmobile) is also available to ensure community members are safe and informed with up-to-date offender status notifications on a 24-hour basis. This mobile application provides an additional mode of information and registration for the state's citizenry. The toll-free telephone registration and notifications as well as the email and text message notifications are available in English and Spanish. Prosecutors' office staff and victim advocates assist many victims with registration.

Users who register for phone notification are required to select a four-digit Personal Identification Number (PIN), which allows the IL-VINE system to monitor when the intended recipient has received the requested notification. If the phone call goes unanswered or if the correct PIN is not entered at the time of the call, the system will continue to attempt to make notification calls as often as every 30 minutes, depending on the nature of the notification, for 24 hours. At any point in the process, users may connect to a live operator for assistance. All e-mail and text message notifications are sent to an email or phone number of the user's choice.

In addition, law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and victim advocates can request access to a restricted area of the IL-VINE system. This restricted part of the system, referred to as "VINEWatch," allows criminal justice personnel and victim advocates to register victims, update registrations, run registration and notification reports, prepare statistical IL-VINE usage reports, conduct emergency override procedures, and conduct offender and case searches.

Statewide System Utilization

Since its implementation in 2001, the IL-VINE system has provided information to 1,448,117 registered users. Searches for court and custody information have totaled 21,673,465. As of October 2021, the IL VINE system has access to custody information for 167,750 offenders and case status information for 1,457,730 open criminal court cases. As of October 2021, there were 167,750 active registered users. During fiscal year 2021, the system provided 47,255 telephonic

notifications, 179,296 email notifications, 162,442 text message notifications, 757 In-App notifications and 118 TTY notifications.

As noted earlier, this service is secure and free-of-charge to the users. The law expressly prohibits the Office of the Attorney General from releasing names, addresses, phone numbers and email addresses of those who register with the IL-VINE system, thereby ensuring the victim's anonymity and safety. [725 ILCS 120/8.5(h)]

System Improvement and Upgrades

As with any technology, improvements and upgrades are critical to maintain a robust system. Over the years, the Attorney General's Office utilized grant money to add the text messaging system (2011), upgrade the interfaces to 29 county systems (2012), and add DHS to the system (2012). VINEmobile was added in 2013 and the VINELink website was redesigned in September 2015.

In June 2021, the Attorney General's Office completely overhauled the IL-VINE system. The new platform provides users with an enhanced experience in numerous ways, including:

- Heightened emphasis on confidentiality and security
- Enhanced data reporting metrics
- A location-based service provider directory, including description of services and contact information
- Registration Link, to make a seamless process for registration across all information providers including DOC, jail, and courts. This eliminates the necessity for multiple registrations
- Seamless national registration process for all Enhanced VINE participating states
- Voice interaction for phone offender search and registration
- Improved service-oriented architecture that eliminates down-time for product-level maintenance/enhancements and allows for easier integration through web service Application Program Interface (API)

Training support for the rollout of the new platform included quick reference guides and numerous webinars for end users of IL-VINE system, including the Illinois Department of Corrections, law enforcement agencies, State's Attorney's office personnel, and victims' advocates. A Google digital ad campaign was launched in conjunction with the migration to the new platform. Those ads continue to be monitored for performance and viability.

IL- VINE System Operational Costs

Until FY21, the operating costs for VINE were disbursed from the Violent Crime Victims Assistance (VCVA) Fund. The Violent Crime Victims Assistance Act imposes a fine on persons convicted of criminal offenses and certain offenses listed in the Illinois Vehicle Code. These fines are deposited in the Violent Crime Victims Assistance Fund, which was used not only for the IL-VINE system, but also for victim service programs administered by the Office of the Illinois Attorney General, including grants to programs that provide services to crime victims. [725 ILCS 240/1 et. seq.]

A portion of the sex offender registration fees are deposited in the Attorney General Sex Offender Awareness, Training, and Education Fund. This fund contributes to the maintenance costs associated with the receipt of data related to notifications related to sex offenders. The maintenance costs for the IL-VINE service will increase in the future.

Public Act 100-0987, effective July 1, 2019, made changes to the funding mechanism for the VCVA Fund. This law restructured the fines, fees, and costs assessed in criminal cases in Illinois, including the amounts deposited in the VCVA Fund. We continue to monitor the impact of Public Act 100-0987 on the VCVA Fund, including any additional impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the VCVA funding stream. As was the case for the FY 21 budget, the Office has shifted operating costs for VINE from the VCVA Fund to other special funds for FY 22. It is important that sufficient funding to support VINE operations is provided in order to preserve the continuity of its important service for victims, witnesses, family members, law enforcement officers, and probation officers. Please see Attachment A for the VCVA deposit trend.

IL-VINE System Benefits

The IL-VINE system is a significant factor in insuring victim safety in an efficient and cost-effective manner. The decrease in registrations and notifications is likely attributed to the reduction of court activity and the adjustment of DOC activity in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. IL-VINE serves as a valuable resource to assist law enforcement and prosecutors as they carry out their constitutional and statutory duties to notify victims of crime of changes in an offender's custody status and upcoming court dates. The Attorney General's staff is dedicated to making the system technologically up to date, user friendly and well-managed.

To ensure the public is aware of this valuable service, staff from the Attorney General's Office provides training to agency users on the features and benefits of the IL-VINE system. Training and a fact sheet are available to law enforcement, prosecutors, and victim advocates. In addition, the Attorney General's staff distributes materials about the system to interested parties throughout the state.

If you have any questions about the existing IL-VINE system or the new enhancements, or would like a demonstration about how this system effectively serves the victims and witnesses of violent crime in your district, please do not hesitate to contact Kathy Carroll at 312-814-3683 or Sharisse Kimbro at 312-814-1427 of the Attorney General's Office.

Sincerely,



Sharisse Kimbro
Chief, Violence Prevention and Crime Victim Services Division