



OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
STATE OF ILLINOIS

Lisa Madigan
ATTORNEY GENERAL

October 31, 2018

RE: Illinois Automated Victim Notification (AVN) System - 2018 Status

Dear Honorable Members of the Illinois Legislature:

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 the Illinois Automated Victim Notification System (AVN 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. I am pleased to provide you with this update on the operation of the Illinois AVN system.

The Illinois AVN System Basics

The Illinois Automated Victim Notification 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 Illinois AVN is a critical element in ensuring that law enforcement officials, the Department of Corrections (DOC), the Department of Human Services (DHS) 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 (VINEWatch), affording them the opportunity to further assist victims.

The Illinois AVN 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 Human Services forensic mental health facilities throughout the state. The Illinois AVN system also receives information about sex offenders through an interface with a vendor that receives data from law enforcement agencies registering sex offenders. The AVN 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 87 jails, 95 court systems, the Illinois Department of Corrections, and seven facilities in the Illinois Department of Mental Health, participating in AVN.

The Illinois Department of Human Services 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 an offender in DHS custody has been released on and returned from an off-grounds pass and notice when the offender is conditionally released, dies, or escapes. DHS 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 Illinois AVN 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. Prosecutor's office staff and victim advocates in programs providing victim services 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 Illinois AVN 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 AVN 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 AVN usage reports, conduct emergency override procedures, and conduct offender and case searches.

Since its implementation in 2001, the Illinois AVN system has provided information to 1,153,954 registered users. Searches for court and custody information have totaled 13,423,965. As of October 17, 2018, the Illinois AVN system has access to custody information for 113,462 offenders and case status information for over 2,965,351 open criminal court cases. As of October 17, 2018, there were 330,805 active registered users. During fiscal year 2018, the system provided 1,005,649 telephonic notifications, 198,977 email notifications and 142,117 text message 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 AVN system, thereby ensuring the victim's anonymity and safety. [725 ILCS 120/8.5(h)]

As with any technology, improvements and upgrades are critical to maintain a robust system. Over the years, the Attorney General's Office utilized federal 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.

Upgrade of the System

The vendor for the AVN system is in the process of implementing a complete remodel of the system. This upgrade will include better data security and functionality as well as additional features to benefit victims. Additional features include: directories of service providers in the area where the victim resides, linkages for registrations of offenders as they move from a county jail to DOC, a watch list of offenders, and contact lists of victim service providers. The one-time cost for the upgrade is \$955,000.00. The Attorney General's Office is exploring federal funding sources to pay for the upgrade.

On-going AVN Operational Costs

The Violent Crime Victims Assistance Act (VCVA) Fund pays the annual operating costs for the AVN system. The Violent Crime Victims Assistance Act currently requires the imposition of a fine on offenders convicted of criminal offenses and certain offenses listed in the Illinois Vehicle Code. A court cannot reduce or waive the VCVA fine. These fines are deposited in the Violent Crime Victims Assistance Fund, which is used not only for the AVN system, but also for a grant program administered by the Office of the Illinois Attorney General that provides funding to crime victim service organizations and agencies in Illinois. [725 ILCS 240/1 et. seq.] A portion of the sex offender registration fees deposited in the Attorney General Sex Offender Awareness, Training, and Education Fund pay for the maintenance costs associated with the receipt of data related to notifications related to sex offenders.

Public Act 100-0987 made comprehensive revisions to the statutes relating to the imposition of fines and fees in criminal cases. The relevant changes are effective July 1, 2019. The new law repeals the fine provisions of the Violent Crime Victims Assistance Act and places all fines, fees and assessments into the Criminal and Traffic Assessment Act. The Criminal and Traffic Assessment Act establishes 14 schedules; each schedule establishes the amount of fines and fees to be assessed on offenders who are convicted of the crimes for that schedule. Each schedule also sets forth the disbursement of the amount of the assessment to various funds. Some of the fines will be deposited into the VCVA Fund. The new law also provides for automatic and discretionary waivers of all or a portion of an assessment. It is difficult at this time to determine the effect the new law will have on the amount of money deposited into the VCVA Fund. Any decrease in the amounts deposited into the VCVA Fund will adversely affect the ability of the Attorney General's Office to pay future annual operating costs for the AVN system.

The new law also provides for the automatic repeal of the Criminal and Traffic Assessment Act on January 1, 2021. If the law is not extended past the repeal date, the funding stream to the VCVA will cease and a new source of funding for the annual operating costs of the AVN system will need to be found.

Continued Benefits

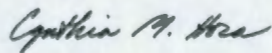
The AVN system is a significant factor in insuring victim safety in an efficient and cost-effective manner. It has been a great success, as evidenced by the increase in the number of victims and citizens using the system. AVN serves as a valuable resource to assist law enforcement, prosecutors, DOC and DHS 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 be technologically up to date, user friendly and well managed.

Staff from Attorney General Lisa Madigan's Office provides training to agency users on the features and benefits of the Illinois AVN system. Training and a fact sheet on VINEWatch 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 Illinois AVN system, 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 Cynthia Hora at 312-814-1427 of the Attorney General's Office.

On behalf of the AVN Committee, we thank Attorney General Madigan for providing this invaluable service to the citizens of Illinois.

Sincerely,



Cynthia M. Hora
Crime Victim and Witness Notification Advisory Committee