



**OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
STATE OF ILLINOIS**

KWAME RAOUL
ATTORNEY GENERAL

October 31, 2020

RE: Illinois Automated Victim Notification (AVN) System - 2020 Status

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 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. As Chair of the AVN Committee, I am pleased to provide you with this update on the operation and enhancement of the Illinois AVN 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 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), 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 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, 96 court systems, the Illinois Department of Corrections, and seven facilities in the Illinois Department of Mental Health, participating in AVN.

The Illinois Department of Mental Health (DMH) 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 DMH 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 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.

Statewide System Utilization

Since its implementation in 2001, the Illinois AVN system has provided information to 1,353,701 registered users. Searches for court and custody information have totaled 19,279,226. As of October 2020, the Illinois AVN system has access to custody information for 292,476 offenders and case status information for 1,408,616 open criminal court cases. As of October 2020, there were 292,476 active registered users. During fiscal year 2020, the system provided 835,096 telephonic notifications, 153,856 email notifications and 140,213 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)]

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.

The Attorney General's Office recently taken steps to implement a complete overhaul of the AVN system. This new platform, Enhanced VINE (EVINE), will enhance the user experience in numerous ways.

With the expanded victim interaction and resulting data, Enhanced VINE includes:

- Heightened emphasis on confidentiality and security
- Enhanced data reporting metrics
- A location-based service provider list, 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)

Complete implementation of the enhanced system is anticipated in the Summer of 2021. Training support for the rollout of Enhanced VINE will include quick reference guides and numerous webinars for end users of AVN, including the Illinois Department of Corrections, law enforcement agencies, State's Attorney's office personnel, and victims' advocates

On-going AVN Operational Costs

The operating costs for the current AVN system are 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 is used not only for the AVN 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 AVN service will not decrease, and are likely to increase in the future. The continued operation of the Illinois AVN system rests on the solvency of the Violent Crime Victim Assistance Fund and the Attorney General Sex Offender Awareness, Training and Education Fund.

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 20 budget, the Office has shifted operating costs of the VCVA Fund to other special funds for FY 21. It is important that sufficient funding to support AVN operations be sustained in order to preserve the continuity of its important service for victims, witnesses, family members, law enforcement officers, and probation officers.

Continued Benefits

The AVN system is a significant factor in insuring victim safety in an efficient and cost-effective manner. The number of users served and individual searches have increased this fiscal year. The decrease in registrations and notifications are likely attributed to the reduction of court activity and the adjustment of DOC activity in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. AVN 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 be 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 Illinois AVN system. Training and a fact sheet on VINE Watch 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 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.

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

Sincerely,



Sharisse Kimbro
Chief, Crime Victim Services Division