



OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
STATE OF ILLINOIS

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Secretary of the Senate

Lisa Madigan
ATTORNEY GENERAL

October 31, 2016

RE: Illinois Automated Victim Notification (AVN) System - 2016 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. As Chairman of the AVN Committee, I am pleased to provide you with this update on the operation and enhancement 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, and information related to registered sex offenders. 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 utilized to ensure that law enforcement officials, prosecutors, the Department of Corrections (DOC), and the Department of Human Services 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, prosecutors, and victim advocates can be given special access to the system, 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, selected Department of Mental Health facilities throughout the state, and with sex offender management software used by law enforcement agencies to register and monitor sex offenders. The Illinois 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, seven facilities in the Illinois Department of Mental Health, and law enforcement agencies across the state that register sex offenders participating in AVN. The Illinois Department of Mental Health provides 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 include notices that the offenders in custody has been released on and returned from an off-grounds pass and notice when the offender is conditionally released, dies, or escapes. These 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 (1866-566-8439), (TTY-I-877-502-2423), or register online at www.vinelink.com (commonly referred to as "VINELink"). A mobile phone application (VINEmobile) is now available to ensure community members are safe and informed with up-to-date offender status notifications on a 24-hours 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. Staff in State's Attorneys' Offices 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 for 24 hours. At any point in the process, users may connect to a live operator for assistance. All email and text message notifications are sent to an email or phone number of the user's choice.

In addition, law enforcement, 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 958,614 registered users. Searches for court and custody information have totaled 9,119,122. As of October 15, 2016, the Illinois AVN system has access to custody information for 116,469 offenders and case status information for over 991,910 open criminal court cases. As of October 15, 2016, there were 358,595 active registered users. During fiscal year 2016, the system provided 1,511,666 telephonic notifications, 210,300 email notifications and 110,816 text message notifications. As noted earlier, this service is completely secure and free-of-charge to the users. The Rights of Crime Victims and Witnesses Act was amended in 2015 to prohibit 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)].

Ongoing technological improvements and software upgrades help ensure the integrity of the AVN 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.

AVN Operational Costs

The operating costs for the current AVN system are disbursed from the Violent Crime Victims Assistance 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 grants to programs that provide services to crime victims. [725 ILCS 240/1 et. seq.]

Continued Benefits

The AVN system serves as a valuable resource to assist law enforcement, prosecutors, and court personnel 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. To ensure the public is aware of this valuable service, 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 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 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,



Mr. Greg Sullivan
Chairman,
Crime Victim and Witness Notification Advisory Committee