



OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
STATE OF ILLINOIS

Lisa Madigan
ATTORNEY GENERAL

December 1, 2011

RE: Illinois Automated Victim Notification (AVN) System

Dear Honorable Members of the Illinois Legislature:

The Crime Victim and Witness Notification Advisory Committee (AVN Committee) was created in 1999 to assist the Attorney General in the implementation of the Illinois Automated Victim Notification System (Illinois 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 an exciting update on the operation and enhancement of the Illinois AVN system.

The Illinois AVN System

The Illinois Automated Victim Notification System provides information about changes in an offender's custodial status and case status. The bilingual (English/Spanish) notifications are made by telephone and/or email to victims, witnesses, family members, law enforcement officers, probation officers, and interested members of the public. The telephone and email services are free to users and available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The Illinois AVN is critical 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, and the implementation legislation contained in the Rights of Crime Victims and Witnesses Act, 725 ILCS 120/4 and 4.5]. The system also affords law enforcement, prosecutors, and victim advocates special access to the system that allows them 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, and circuit court clerks throughout the state. The Illinois AVN system transfers information from these sources to a centralized communication center, which in turn, generates telephone and email updates to any individual who is a registered user of the system. Currently, 87 jails, 95 courts and the Illinois Department of Corrections are on line. Although the statute establishing the AVN system

mandates the participation of the Department of Human Services to provide notifications to crime victims related to offenders in the Department's custody, the agency is not yet on line.

To register for the Illinois AVN system, victims and other interested parties simply call a toll-free number: 1-866-5-NOTIFY (1866-566-8439), (TTY-1-877-502-2423), or register online at www.vinelink.com (commonly referred to as "VINELink"). The toll-free telephone registration and notifications and the email notifications are available in English and Spanish.

Users that 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 notification of the requested event. If the correct PIN is not entered, the system will continue to attempt to make notification calls as often as every 30 minutes for 24 hours, allowing the user to correct their PIN entry. At any point in the process, users may connect to a live operator for assistance. All e-mail notifications are sent to an email of the user's choice.

In addition, law enforcement, prosecutors, and victim advocates can request access to a part of the AVN system not accessible to victims or the general public. This 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.

As of October 1, 2011, the Illinois AVN system has access to custody information for approximately 63,411 offenders and case status information for over 521,000 open criminal court cases. Since its implementation in 2001, the Illinois AVN system has provided information to 422,151 registered users. In October 2011, there were 265,601 active registered users. During fiscal year 2011, the system provided 139,330 telephonic notifications and 18,351 email notifications. This service is completely secure and free-of-charge to the users.

New Initiatives

In 2008, the General Assembly amended the Sex Offender Community Notification Act [730 ILCS 152/1 *et. seq.*] to require county sheriffs to provide victims of sex offenses certain information relating to sex offenders. Given the success of the AVN system at notifying victims of changes in an offender's custodial status and court case status, members of the AVN Committee and the Illinois Sheriffs' Association recommended to the Attorney General that the AVN system be used to provide the statutorily mandated sex offender notifications. In response, the Attorney General applied for and received funding in 2009 from the Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs SAVIN Grant Program (Statewide Automated Victim Information and Notification) to enhance the existing Illinois AVN system to include notifications relating to sex offenders. County sheriffs and local police departments are being provided sex offender management software called "OffenderWatch" that is used to register and keep track of offenders. "Offender Watch" is a web based program that will provide data to the Illinois AVN

System, who will in turn provide phone and email notifications to victims. We expect the AVN notifications to begin in December 2011. The AVN Committee is convinced that this enhancement will assist law enforcement as they carry out their duties under the Sex Offender Community Notification Act.

Early this year, the Committee recommended the Attorney General apply for another grant from the Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs SAVIN Grant Program (Statewide Automated Victim Information and Notification) to enhance the existing Illinois AVN system. The Attorney General accepted the Committee's recommendation and was successful in obtaining funds to: (1) upgrade 29 agency interfaces; (2) add text messaging as a third method of notification; and (3) add a survey tool to measure user satisfaction. In addition, the grant will fund an interface so the Department of Human Services can provide automated notifications to victims.

On-going operational Costs

The operating costs for the current AVN system are paid out of 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.*]

Beginning January 1, 2012, at the end of the grant period, the on-going costs of providing sex offender notifications will be paid out of the Attorney General's Sex Offender Awareness, Training, and Education Fund. Thirty dollars of the \$100 annual sex offender registration is deposited into this fund. [730 ILCS 150/3(c)(6)] A significant number of sheriffs and police agencies have not been collecting this fee. The Attorney General's Office and members of the Committee has been communicating with sheriffs and police agencies about the importance of collecting the fee to ensure the continuation of the notifications.

More Information is Available

The AVN system continues to see an increase in the number of victims using the system. In addition, the system has undergone an enhancement that provides notifications relating to information about sex offenders. AVN 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 on the features and benefits of the Illinois AVN system.

In addition, the Attorney General's staff distributes brochures, fact sheets, and other materials about the system to interested parties throughout the state. Training and a fact sheet on VINEWatch are available to law enforcement, prosecutors, and victim advocates.

If you have any questions about the existing Illinois AVN system or the new enhancements, or would like additional information about how this system effectively serves the victims and witnesses of violent crime in your district, please do not hesitate to contact Mike Bastien at 618/529-6405 or Cynthia Hora at 312/814-1427 of the Attorney General's Office.

Requests for free brochures or other resource materials for distribution in your local and Springfield offices may be made through Mr. Bastien.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Greg Sullivan".

Greg Sullivan, Chairman
Crime Victim and Witness
Notification Advisory Committee