



AUTOMATED CRIME VICTIMS NOTIFICATION SYSTEM-HB 96 OHIO BIENNIAL BUDGET  
HOUSE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE  
TESTIMONY OF JON MUSICK, EQUIFAX, PROVIDERS OF THE VICTIM INFORMATION  
NOTIFICATION EVERYDAY SYSTEM (VINE) AND BRIAN DUNAWAY, VERSATERM PUBLIC SAFETY  
March 11, 2025

*Equifax/VINE:*

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments on House Bill 96 and the request to supplement the Attorney General's ongoing efforts to keep victims, survivors, law enforcement, and the public both safe and informed. The Victim Information Notification Everyday (VINE) system has worked with the Ohio Attorney General since 2010 to provide millions of lifesaving notifications to Ohio's citizens. In 2024 alone, over 400,000 individual notifications were provided to 167,233 citizens in the Buckeye state.

Equifax acquired the provider of the VINE service, Appriss Insights, LLC ("Insights"), on October 1, 2021. Insights' mission is to help government agencies in victim services, law enforcement and social services make better-informed decisions for early responses to people-driven risks. We help victims and their families become safer and more informed through timely offender release, court case, and protective order notifications. VINE enables victims and survivors to remain vigilant and proactive, and fosters a greater sense of security throughout the criminal justice process.

Equifax is committed not only in sustaining the success VINE has achieved, but also investing in VINE to expand its reach and enhance the service for victims, law enforcement, and everyone affected by crime. The enhancement is what we are here primarily to discuss today with our partners, Versaterm Public Safety. I would first like to provide you with the background of VINE.

VINE was founded in 1994 in response to the murder of a young Louisville woman, Mary Byron. After her assailant was incarcerated for raping, assaulting, and stalking Mary, he was released but she was never informed, despite requests from her family. On Mary's 21st birthday, her assailant approached her with a gun and fired multiple shots at close range, killing her instantly. Automation plays a crucial role in VINE's effectiveness, especially against human error, like in Mary's case.

Since 1994, VINE has grown to be the nation's leader in victim notification, and we are the largest notification platform with relationships in 47 states. In nearly all of the 47 states, we are responsible for all notifications – including county jails, departments of correction, and pardons and parole agency notifications. VINE is designed to be user-friendly and the system can be accessed through multiple channels, including through phone, text, in-app notifications, and TTY for the hearing impaired, and it is tirelessly supported by live US-based sensitivity trained operators 24/7. Our sensitivity-trained, live

operators are a crucial part of the service we provide. This round-the-clock availability is vital for victims to address urgent needs that may arise, and can provide a crucial lifeline for victims who need assistance or updates about an offender's status.

Equifax and Versaterm Public Safety partnered after listening across the country to the growing need of law enforcement and victims to have enhanced automated information that precedes the arrest of an individual. Listening to those voices who have stressed the need for earlier automation, we recently entered into a national partnership to provide an end-to-end crime victim notification system that can push notices and alerts to victims from the 911 call through an offender's release or parole. I would like to emphasize the importance of timely and thorough notifications for victims on actions of their case even before an arrest is made. This enhancement to the existing VINE service is vital for a number of reasons, ensuring citizens are informed but also their rights are respected and they are provided with the right resources and necessary support through the entire process.

Our specific request of the Ohio Legislature is to fund this end-to-end notification system by increasing the existing line item for the VINE program in C1:6 Victims of Crime in the Office of Attorney General budget in ALI 055441. We believe that a pilot program for \$4.5M in year one and \$4M in year two will provide significant achievements in safety across the state. It is important to note that the amendment presented before you has an additional \$1M for the core VINE function. Unfortunately, due to federal cuts and declining Victims of Crime Act funds, we are assisting the Attorney General to procure general revenue funds to help alleviate reliance on the federal government.

*Versaterm:*

Versaterm was founded in 1977, and now, with over 46 years of experience, we are in 13 countries across six continents, and serve over 600,000 public safety professionals. Versaterm's solutions are designed to provide actionable insights, streamline operations, and support agencies in making informed decisions that protect and improve communities globally.

Engaging with customers across multiple states, we promptly discovered that the platform not only provided better victim notifications but could additionally facilitate compliance with Marsy's Law, an important policy issue to Ohio voters. Ohio voters approved state Issue 1, the Marsy's Law Crime Victim Rights Initiative, with 82.5% in favor, granting constitutional rights to victims of crime. In 2023, the Ohio legislature passed House Bill 343, sponsored by Representative Andrea White (R-Kettering), to align Ohio's laws and criminal justice system with the victim protections established in Issue 1. Issue 1 and HB 343 require the protection of victim's rights. VINE and our joint solution can assist with some of the following components:

- *the right to information about the rights and services available to crime victims;*
  - QR code with crime victim pamphlet

- Officers carry in their patrol car copies of a victims rights form (see attached) developed and produced by the Ohio Attorney General's office. These forms are distributed to agencies across the state.
- *the right to notification in a timely manner of all proceedings in the case;*
  - Our solution updates every 15 minutes, 2 times a day for prisons, and is made available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
- *the right to be present and heard at all court proceedings, including the right to petition the court to protect the victim's rights;*
  - Our solution has the ability to notify registered users about upcoming court events such as case status, dispositions, and hearing changes for scheduled court events.
- *the right to a prompt conclusion of the case;*
  - Our solution assists all participants in the criminal justice system and contributes to swift and accurate case conclusions.
- *the right to notice of the release or escape of the accused;*
  - Our solution can notify of changes in an offender's custody status, including release, transfer, or escape, via phone, email, or text message, depending on registration preferences.

With the enhanced notification system:

- Victims get an automatic message with a link to resources and other VINE programs
- Officers and detectives have no manual steps to provide Victims access to helpful information. Today, officers carry copies of a victims' rights form (see attached) developed and produced by the Ohio Attorney General's office in their patrol car. These forms are distributed to agencies across the state.
- Victims receive timely and automatic information related to their Law Enforcement investigation, including when an arrest was made.
- Detectives and Investigators can better keep their victims up-to-date on the status and changes to their case.
- Currently, VINE notifies victims of any movement of their offender. With the click of a link, it automatically registers victims of crime for custody status notifications about offenders within the VINELink database without manual victim registration.

From the moment a call is initiated, law enforcement agencies can automatically send notifications, starting from the initial call, including updates on response status, ongoing investigative activities, arrest and offender tracking information, and prosecution updates. Victims will receive immediate access to VINE victim support resources. Electronic delivery of this information enhances the agency's experience and saves time through automation.

If approved by the Ohio Legislature, Versaterm expects to send automated notifications related to over 6 million calls to the 911 system annually. As a result, we anticipate sending

over 5.3 million acknowledgment messages annually through police and sheriff Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) systems and over 160,000 arrest messages a year.

Today, the combined platform provides end-to-end service in Arizona, Florida, and New York, with additional legislative efforts in Michigan and Pennsylvania. The metric below represents the impact of this combined solution in AZ.

#### Community Connect

- 15 Arizona agencies have gone live since September 2024.
- Over 266,000 victim notifications have been sent through CommunityConnect. Under .5% of people have opted out (the goal is under 1%).
- Over 16,400 self-initiated victim registrations on the resource portal with 1.79% opt-out.
- 9,750 new victim registrations in January alone.
- The number of surveys sent is consistent with those received, suggesting the desire for community feedback.

#### VINE

- January Welcome Messages 9,750
- 294 Total Opt-Outs
- Total Victim Registrations 16,407

The advantages of using VINE and Versaterm services extend beyond those already mentioned. Dispatch centers are frequently understaffed and receive a large volume of calls, including non-emergency and follow-up calls. Automated notifications can help alleviate the burden on dispatch centers by reducing the number of non-emergency and follow-up calls. For example, an automated message can be sent to callers after a specified time has elapsed to inform them of a delayed arrival, eliminating the need for them to call dispatch for an update. Additionally, an automated notification could direct callers to an online reporting system or a non-police service. This has significantly reduced the number of return calls, thereby decreasing call volume and the workload of dispatch centers.

Another benefit of the Versaterm automated system is the ability to survey citizens (the customers of law enforcement agencies) on how they responded to their call for assistance. The surveys are at the agency's discretion and customizable for each agency. After the call for service, the citizen, depending on the call type, would receive an automated message asking how the officer or dispatcher performed or whatever question the agency wants to ask. The information is collected and available for analysis. This information provides the ability to report on feedback, usage, and other key metrics that can demonstrate the impact of community support programs. Agencies report the majority of citizen responses are positive.

This initiative enhances resources and allows local law enforcement agencies to better inform and engage crime victims. The project will automate the victim notification process starting at the point of the original call for service. This effort would allow law enforcement to harness technology to reduce

manual processes, improve community engagement, and facilitate crime victims' rights. The result would be a program that enhances communication, accountability, transparency, and information sharing between our police departments and the citizens of Ohio.

Equifax and VersaTerm Public Safety are proud to partner together to create a seamless experience and interface for Ohioans. In closing, we believe a collaborative partnership between our organization and the state of Ohio has the potential to establish a comprehensive and efficient automated victim notification system. It is our hope that the Legislature recognizes the importance of the services, and works to expand the existing capabilities. We are grateful for the support of the Legislature and seek to work together to advance a safer and more informed Ohio. We appreciate your time today.