



AUTOMATED CRIME VICTIMS NOTIFICATION SYSTEM-HB 96 OHIO BIENNIAL BUDGET
HOUSE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE
TESTIMONY OF ALI MOCK, EQUIFAX, PROVIDERS OF THE VICTIM INFORMATION NOTIFICATION
EVERYDAY SYSTEM (VINE) AND BRIAN DUNAWAY, VERSATERM PUBLIC SAFETY
March 5, 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 2023 alone, nearly 400,000 individual notifications were provided to almost 160,000 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 in 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 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 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. 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 beginning to end of the law enforcement 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.

Versaterm:

On Nov. 7, 2017 Ohio voters approved state Issue 1, the so-called Marcy's Law, by an overwhelming 82.5% margin to grant specific Constitutional rights to victims of crime in Ohio. Issue 1 provides that the rights of victims must be protected as vigorously as the rights of the accused. This constitutional amendment grants victims:

- the right to privacy and to be treated with respect, fairness, and dignity;
- the right to information about the rights and services available to crime victims;
- the right to notification in a timely manner of all proceedings in the case;
- the right to be present and heard at all court proceedings, including the right to petition the court to protect the victim's rights;
- the right to a prompt conclusion of the case;
- to refuse discovery requests made by the accused, except as authorized by Article I, Section 10 of the Ohio constitution;
- the right to reasonable protection from the accused;
- the right to notice of the release or escape of the accused; and
- the right to restitution.

In 2023 the Ohio legislature passed HB 343 sponsored by Rep. Andrea White (R-Kettering) to conform Ohio's laws and criminal justice system with the protections for victims of crime laid out in Issue 1. This law has impacted every aspect of law enforcement from the responding officer, to prosecution and into the judicial system as well as post conviction and incarceration.

Compliance with Issue 1/HB 343 now largely starts with a police officer who responds to an incident involving a victim of crime. 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.

This is step one and in our view the first chance for a potential breakdown in the process. Put yourself in the shoes of a victim of crime. When officers respond you may still be in shock from the incident or maybe even a victim of domestic abuse. This might not be the most opportune time to get a victims rights form to opt into notifications regarding your particular case.

We now have the capability thanks to technology developed by Versaterm Public Safety to push messages and notices to crime victims using electronic messaging. From the moment a 9-1-1 call is initiated, law enforcement agencies can automatically push out notices allowing a victim of crime to opt into the system. They, or a designated victim advocate, will begin getting a constant flow of messages regarding their individual case. Notices can include: contact information for the detective assigned to the case if an investigation is warranted, results of any testing conducted at the crime scene, notice of the prosecutor assigned to the case if it moves forward into the judicial system, court hearing notices and virtually any other notices associated with the case. Versaterm modeled this notification system after what retailers now use when an online order is placed. In that situation the retailer will start a flow of information that the order was received, is being processed, ship date and a confirmation of the shipment along with delivery confirmation. This crime victim notice system operates in the same manner.

If approved by the Ohio Legislature, Versaterm expects to monitor and push out alerts and messages related to over 6 million call to the 9-1-1 system annually. As a result, we anticipate sending over 5.3 million acknowledgement messages annually through police and sheriff Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) systems, and over 160,000 arrest messages a year. 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 help. This survey function can and is typically used even in non-emergency situations.

Equifax and Versaterm Public Safety are proud to partner together to create a seamless experience and interface for Ohioans. In closing, we believe that through a strong partnership with Ohio, we could create a seamless and complete 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 – together – advance a safer and more informed Ohio. We appreciate your time today.