

Testimony in Support of a Pilot Automated Crime Victims Notification System
HB 96 Biennial Budget
Betty D. Montgomery, Ohio Attorney General 1995-2003
Ohio Senate Finance Committee
May 30, 2025

Chairman Cirino and members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My public service began as a prosecutor in the juvenile division, later serving as a municipal court prosecutor before being elected Wood County Prosecutor. During those years I prosecuted many criminal cases and, unfortunately, interacted with and spoke to countless victims of violent crimes.

When I became a State Senator I focused much of my work on bills dealing with crime issues. I was the Senate sponsor of Ohio's Victims' Rights Law. Those years as a prosecutor defined much of my professional life and the rights of crime victims remains an important focus to me personally.

I first encountered VINE (Victim Information and Notification Everyday) during my tenure as Ohio Attorney General. I viewed VINE as a quantum leap forward in serving crime victims. It was and continues to be a fundamental tool to help "the legal system" keep crime victims informed as to the custodial status of the defendants in their cases. It was a tool to help provide some measure of protection to crime victims. VINE also serves to give back some sense of control or well-being to these often very traumatized victims.

My office was a tireless advocate for VINE, traveling to all of Ohio's 88 counties working closely with local law enforcement to stand up this vitally important system. I vividly recall – now over two decades ago - how my office discussed with local law enforcement agencies how this system was going to become a crucial tool and the backbone of a system for communicating seamlessly with victims unwillingly pulled into the criminal justice system.

Fast forward to 2025 where we now have a chance to fulfill our promise to provide information and services to victims of crime. VINE provides automated messaging of the status of incarcerated individuals by interfacing with county jail management system and the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction inmate system. Every 15 minutes VINE sweeps these systems and if there is a change in custody for inmates, their victims receive immediate notification.

We now have the opportunity using a related service called CommunityConnect to expand on VINE and provide victims crucial information earlier and throughout the law enforcement process. Literally from the time a 9-1-1 call is initiated, law enforcement agencies can begin pushing out important information like the status of responding officers. CommunityConnect can also help law enforcement comply with Marcy's Law, a statewide ballot issue voters approved by a more than 85% margin to provide constitutional protections to crime victims. Though well intentioned, Marcy's Law has been an unfunded mandate on law enforcement agencies and compliance is currently handled by paper means. Imagine this, you have just been a victim of a

violent crime and are in shock and pain reeling from the experience. A law enforcement officer hands you a paper form outlining your constitutional rights and available resources and services. This might not be the most opportune time to provide this information. CommunityConnect can push this same information along with crucial case updates out electronically using text messaging or email.

Crime victims in Ohio deserve better and we can do better by expanding the existing VINE program to include CommunityConnect. Please support adding \$4.5 million over the biennium to the Victims Service line item in the Ohio Attorney General's budget so that we can finally begin to fulfill the promise we made to victims several decades ago.

Thank you for your time and consideration.