

**AUTOMATED CRIME VICTIMS NOTIFICATION SYSTEM-HB 96 OHIO BIENNIAL BUDGET
OHIO SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
TESTIMONY OF ALEXANDRIA MOCK, EQUIFAX, PROVIDERS OF THE VICTIM INFORMATION
NOTIFICATION EVERYDAY SYSTEM (VINE) AND BRIAN DUNAWAY, VERSATERM PUBLIC SAFETY**

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.

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.

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.

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 Ohio.

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 911 call through the offender's release or parole.

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 the Office of Attorney General budget .

We believe that a pilot program for \$2.5M in year one and \$2M in year two will provide a significant increase in services to Ohio crime victims. 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.

We partnered to create the enhanced notification system and provide a comprehensive workflow solution for law enforcement and criminal justice notification, community engagement, and support services. The expansion of the VINE platform would include a robust enhanced victim notification system with the integration of Versaterm's Community Connect software.

Versaterm was founded in 1977 and has over 46 years of public safety experience, and Community Connect has been providing notification services for law enforcement, dispatcher centers (911), and prosecutors for almost a decade. The focus has been to improve citizen engagement and crime victim services, create efficiencies, and reduce the administrative burden on the criminal justice system.

A significant benefit of the combined Versaterm/VINE platform is the ability to position Ohio law enforcement agencies to mitigate the administrative and budgetary challenges of complying with Marcy's Law.

Our combined platform allows Ohio Crime Victims to truly realize the benefits of this act. With the combined VINE/Versaterm enhanced Victim Notification System- 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.

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. These automated messages will provide important informational updates and programmatic resources to Ohio crime victims.

Today, the combined platform provides end-to-end service in Arizona, Florida, and New York, with additional legislative efforts underway in Michigan and Pennsylvania.

The following metrics represent the impact of this combined solution in Arizona.

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 9750
- 294 Total Opt-Outs
- Total Victim Registrations 16,407

This initiative enhances resources and allows local law enforcement agencies to improve transparency and better inform and engage crime victims in the state. 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 an enhanced notification process for Ohioans. In closing, we believe that through a strong partnership with Ohio, we could create a seamless and complete automated victim notification system. 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.