

## REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION OF THE WISCONSIN CRIME VICTIMS RIGHTS BOARD

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### Notifications to Victims Regarding Release from Custody

#### Introduction

The Crime Victims Rights Board (“Board”) has authority to issue reports and recommendations concerning the securing and provision of crime victims’ rights and services.

This report is issued as the result of a complaint received by the Board and provides recommendations related to notifications to victims regarding an offender’s custody status when placed in a jail diversion program or on electronic monitoring.

The Board recognizes the challenges and ambiguity across the state regarding notification practices in these circumstances. This report is intended to promote greater clarity and consistency in notification practices. Ensuring that victims receive timely and accurate information about an offender’s custody status is an important component of supporting victims’ safety and participation in the criminal justice process. The Board issues the following recommendations to assist agencies in evaluating and improving their notification practices.

#### Complaint and Board Action

In the complaint before the Board, the complainant was a victim in a matter that resulted in criminal charges against an offender. The victim was provided with a *Victim Rights Request Form* from the district attorney’s office. The form asked in part, “If a defendant is incarcerated, you have the right to timely notification of a defendant’s release, escape, or death.” The form had a spot for the victim to indicate “I want to be

notified.” The victim returned the completed form to the district attorney’s office stating she would like to be notified.

The offender pleaded guilty to a criminal offense and was sentenced to 90 days in county jail, with Huber release privileges. While serving the jail sentence, the offender was placed on electronic monitoring. The victim did not receive notification that the offender was physically out of jail. The victim filed a complaint with the Board against the district attorney’s office, the investigating law enforcement agency, and the county sheriff’s office.

Through the responses to the complaint to the Board, the Board learned the county in which the complaint originated utilizes VINE County Jails (“VINE”), a statewide system that notifies registered individuals when suspects are released from custody from a county jail. Victims are notified about the availability of VINE when they are provided with crime victim information by the investigating agency and by the district attorney’s office. The victim must register with VINE to receive the notifications.

The victim does not dispute she did not register with VINE but indicated she believed she would be notified of the offender’s release based on the *Victim Rights Request Form* she completed and returned to the district attorney’s office.

The Board noted in its decision the district attorney’s office assumed some responsibility to notify the victim of the offender’s release by the method and language used on its *Victim Rights Request Form*. The Board felt it was reasonable for the victim to believe she would be notified of any release by the district attorney’s office based on the language used on the *Victim Rights Request Form*.

Ultimately, the Board did not find a violation of Wis. Const. art. I § 9m (2)(k) because there is ambiguity in the law as to whether jail diversion programs, such as Huber release, or electronic monitoring programs are legally considered “out of custody.”

### **Relevant Law**

- **Wis. Const. art. I § 9m (2)(k):** “[u]pon request, to timely notice of any release or escape of the accused or death of the accused if the accused is in custody or on supervision at the time of death.”
- An Appendix to this report provides additional guidance to agencies regarding the implementation of VINE County Jails.

### **Board Recommendations**

- Although there is ambiguity in the law as to whether jail diversion programs constitute release, the reality is that to victims, an offender no longer physically confined in a jail can pose safety concerns that the victim may want to prepare for. Victims benefit from knowing if the offender is participating in a jail diversion program (i.e., Huber release or electronic monitoring).
- The right to receive notice related to an offender’s custody status is an opt-in right, requiring victims to request to receive this notification. It is important to provide timely and clear information to victims about how to opt-in to receive these notifications.<sup>1</sup>
- An agency may need to notify victims more than once about how to register for notice of an offender’s release from custody. For example, an agency may provide information about how to register for release notifications at the beginning of a case while the offender is in custody in the county jail, and provide another notification about how to register for notices related to the offender’s custody status after the criminal court process has concluded.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Victims may need to register more than once to receive notifications related to an offender’s custody status. If an offender is released from custody and later returns to custody, the victim may need to register again to receive release notifications.

<sup>2</sup> Offenders sentenced to prison/or probation are notified by a program administered by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections, Office of Victim Services and Programs.

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- Agencies should be cautious and clear when taking on notification obligations. Although the district attorney's office may not have intended to take on the responsibility of notifying the victim of custodial matters, the form and language used may create that expectation on the part of the victim. Whether the obligation originally rested with the district attorney's office or not, by offering the service the district attorney's office assumed the notification obligation to itself. This can lead to confusion for victims, and victims not receiving timely notification related to an offender's custody status.
- County jails in Wisconsin can utilize VINE to register victims and send automated notifications regarding a county jail inmate's custody status. VINE has the capability to send a customizable notification to registrants informing the registrant that an inmate is participating in a jail diversion program. Jails are encouraged to utilize this capability to provide registrants with detailed information regarding an inmate's custody status.<sup>3</sup>

Dated this 20<sup>th</sup> day of March, 2026.



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Chairperson Jennifer Dunn  
Crime Victims Rights Board

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<sup>3</sup> See attached Appendix: "VINE County Jails and Victim Notifications"

# VINE COUNTY JAILS AND VICTIM NOTIFICATIONS

In Wisconsin, victims have a constitutional right to timely notice of the release, escape, or death of the accused who is in custody ([Wis. Constitution, Art. 1, Section 9m\(2\)\(k\)](#)).

This right is an opt-in right, requiring victims to request to receive this notification.

To provide these notifications, all counties in Wisconsin utilize VINE County Jails, more commonly known as Vinelink, to register victims and send automated notifications regarding a county jail inmate's custody status.

This resource is intended to provide an overview of the functionality of VINE County Jails and information to support accurate and timely notifications to victims and other registrants about a county jail inmate's custody status.

This resource was created by the Wisconsin Department of Justice, Office of Crime Victim Services and Wisconsin Department of Corrections, Office of Victim Services and Programs (OVSP).

## VINE County Jails Overview

VINE County Jails provides information and notification regarding inmates in **county jails** to victims, law enforcement, and the community.

Victims and the public can enroll through the VINE County Jails website or phone line. Once enrolled, registrants will receive automated phone, text, or email notifications about changes in an inmate's custody status. Alternatively, registrants can call or go online to check an inmate's status without registering for notifications. This service is available in English, Spanish, Hmong, and many other languages.

VINE County Jails is a service powered by an interface between each county's jail management system and VINE County Jails. Equifax is the vendor of VINE County Jails, but each county jail's regular booking practices populate the information and initiate the notifications.

Once enrolled, registrants will receive notifications regarding changes in an inmate's custody status. If registered for phone notification, registrants are required to choose a four-digit PIN and will need to enter this four-digit PIN to stop automated phone calls. Calls will continue for 24 hours or until the correct PIN is entered.

VINE County Jails is a service managed by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections, Office of Victim Services and Programs (OVSP) in partnership with local law enforcement agencies.



**Website:**  
[www.vinelink.com](http://www.vinelink.com)

**PHONE: 1-888-8463**

Toll-free phone support is available 24/7/365 for callers who need help locating an offender, registering for notifications, or accessing victim services in their area.

Over 200 languages are available via live operator support.

## County Jail Administration Responsibilities

Each county jail needs at least one **VINE County Jails Administrator**, who serves as the lead for VINE related issues. Many counties choose to have multiple administrators.

VINE County Jail Administrative Users can:

- Manually generate notifications in the event of a system outage using the emergency override procedure.
- Block certain inmates from appearing on vinelink.com (ex: confidential informants or high-profile incarcerated persons).
- View information on registrations and past notifications in the county.
- Stop unwanted notifications, when requested by the registrant.

An administrator can also create new county staff users, disable accounts, and reset user passwords in the administrative portals of VINE County Jails. Additionally, administrators receive notifications about system issues.

To request administrative access to VINE County Jails, an agency should contact OVSP with the name, title, email, and phone number of the person (or persons) in need of access.

When an administrator retires or leaves the agency, the agency should plan that the responsibilities are transferred to another person in the agency. This helps ensure accurate, timely notifications continue for all registrants.

When changing or upgrading a jail management system, administrators should notify OVSP as soon as possible to reduce the length of service disruption.

## Emergency Override Procedure

When a jail is offline, VINE County Jails will send an email notification to the administrator(s) for the county. This notification will include a list of inmates with active registrants who require notification if there are status changes during outage. It is imperative that agencies have a plan in place to ensure registrants continue to receive timely notification of changes in an inmate's custody status.

## Electronic Monitoring and Huber Release

VINE has the capability to send out a customizable notification to registrants that the inmate has been released from custody on electronic monitoring or Huber.

Jails are encouraged to utilize this capability to provide registrants with detailed information regarding an inmate's custody status (See Example A).

*This e-mail is to inform you that TEST INMATE with offender number 920100625987 was placed on **unsupervised custody status: Electronic Monitoring** on 01/13/2025.*

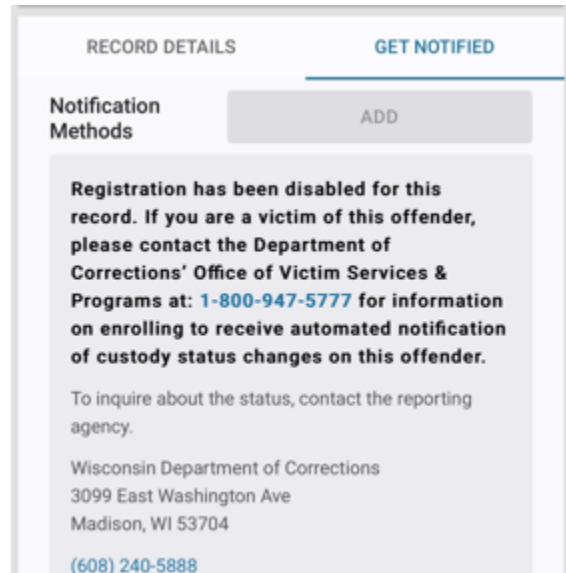
*As a result, **this offender will not be under constant correctional supervision**. If you have any concerns about your immediate safety, contact your local law enforcement agency, or if you have an emergency, call 911.*

Example A

## Additional Considerations

- VINE’s website will display individuals who are inmates incarcerated in a Wisconsin Department of Corrections institution, and individuals who are on community supervision through the Wisconsin Department of Corrections, Division of Community Corrections; however, **registration is disabled**.

If an individual who is not currently a county jail inmate displays on the website, the appropriate resource contact information will be listed for further information (See Example B).



Example B

- If an individual is on community supervision **and** is booked in a county jail, two records will display on the VINE website. One record will indicate the individual is out of custody on community supervision, and the other record will indicate the individual is in custody in a county jail. VINE does not recognize these as the same individual, as one is populated by Wisconsin Department of Corrections data, and one is populated by the county jail booking number (See Example C).



Example C

## NEED HELP?

For assistance or questions about VINE County Jails, contact the Wisconsin Department of Corrections, Office of Victim Services and Programs (OVSP) at: [docovspadmin@wisconsin.gov](mailto:docovspadmin@wisconsin.gov).

For troubleshooting issues with VINE, provide as much information as possible (including examples) and a technical contact to expedite the resolution process.