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# Victims can keep tabs on offenders

## Notification system becomes statewide

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**By HECTOR CASTRO**  
P-I REPORTER

For many victims of crime, the greatest fear is that their attacker will be released from jail without their knowledge.

"Some victims are very concerned that people are going to come out and find them again," said Christi Hurt, acting director of the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs. "It is a big fear."

Now, crime victims across the state can go online or use their phone to find out when those who have attacked them are released, something crime-victim advocates say will give the victims a tool to plan for their safety.

"Where there wasn't victim notification, now there is," said Donald Pierce, executive director of the Washington Association of Sheriff's and Police Chiefs, which will implement the program.

Called VINE, an acronym for Victim Information Notification Everyday, the computerized program has been up and running in King County since 2002, available by telephone. It also has been available in Pierce and Snohomish counties, also by phone.

The program is linked to jail systems, which continually update the status of the inmates. Users register, anonymously if they choose, and are notified when the person in whom they're interested is released or their custody status changes if, for example, they are moved to a different facility.

Victim advocates say the programs are widely used.

In the three Washington counties that have offered the system, an average of 2,300 notification calls are made each month, Pierce said.

Now the program is becoming available in counties across the state. Developed by Appriss, a

Kentucky-based software company, the system as of Monday included 36 county and municipal jails across the state. The goal is to connect 58 jails statewide with VINE before the end of the year, company president Mike Davis said.

At a news conference Monday outside the Regional Justice Center in Kent to announce the new service, Davis said the development of the program began with a domestic-violence murder in his home state.

In 1993, Mary Byron, a hairdresser in Louisville, Ky., was unaware that her abusive former boyfriend had been released from jail. He caught her in her car on her 21st birthday and shot her seven times. A year later, the automated telephone victim notification system was begun.

Under the expanded program now available in Washington, crime victims can register either by visiting the Web site, [www.vinelink.com](http://www.vinelink.com), or by calling 877-846-3492.

The program is set up to notify a person by phone, calling him or her continuously for a 24-hour period until the person enters a personal identification number to demonstrate he or she has received the information.

Though intended as a tool to assist crime victims, anyone can access the site to find out the incarceration status of an individual. Registration is only required if a user wants to be notified of a change in status.

Creation of the statewide system was funded in part by a federal grant of about \$580,000 and state funding in the amount of \$411,000. The program will cost about \$500,000 annually to operate.

In the coming year, the VINE program will grow, allowing victims of domestic violence who receive protection orders to be notified when those orders are served on their abusers.

Davis said it appears victims of domestic violence are those most likely to use the service.

But Dave Johnson, executive director of the Washington Coalition of Crime Victim Advocates, said what happens to criminals is important to all victims.

"I can assure you that victims of all crimes are concerned when offenders are released," he said.

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