

Ohio upgrades criminal tracking system for victims

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CINCINNATI (AP) — Crime victims will be able to find out when an inmate is released with the help of upcoming changes to Ohio's criminal tracking system.

State officials say a \$100,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Justice will allow Ohio to upgrade its current tracking system by 2010.

"It will empower victims and allow them more control over their own situation and safety," said Matt Hellman, administrator of the Ohio attorney general's office of victim services. "If they need to, they can make plans for their own safety and for the safety of friends and family."

Victims already can check the status of current inmates still in prison through the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction's internal tracking system and by phone and e-mail through a national automated information and notification network. That system provides information on changes to an inmate's status, including releases, transfers, escapes and deaths.

The enhancements to the system — known as Victim Information and Notification Everyday, or VINE — will allow victims to follow offenders' movements after they're released on parole or probation.

The system also tracks inmates who are moved to the state's intensive prison program, which puts prisoners through specialized education and treatment, allowing them to possibly earn earlier release dates.

A woman whose daughter was five months pregnant when she was killed by her husband in southern Ohio 2001 favored the upgrade, even though the man isn't eligible for parole until 2041.

"It's a way for survivors and victims to follow what happens to a suspect and make sure that person stays behind bars as long as they're supposed to," said Sharon Nolan, 55, of Milford.

Ohio was one of the first states to offer the system, implementing it in 1998, according to the state attorney general's office.

State officials say the system was used nearly 1 million times in 2007 to check on the custody status of Ohio inmates or receive notification of changes in that status.

The program is a free and anonymous computer-based service available to anyone 24 hours a day.

On the Net:

VINE: <http://www.VINELink.com>

Information from: The Cincinnati Enquirer, <http://www.enquirer.com>

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