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**Maine Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
An Act to Provide Electronic Notification to Victims of Crimes - LD 981, SP0408**

**Testimony of Julie Hart, Director of Government Relations
Equifax, Providers of Victim Information and Notification Everyday (VINE)**

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Chair Beebe and Members of the Joint Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on LD 981. My name is Julie Hart, and I am the Northeast Government Relations Director for Equifax. I'm here today to discuss our Victim Information and Notification Everyday service, VINE.

VINE stands as a cornerstone mission at Equifax, dedicated to empowering victims, individuals and communities through timely and critical criminal justice information. By way of background, Equifax acquired Louisville, Kentucky based Appriss Insights, LLC on October 1, 2021, and proudly retained the focus on providing automated victim notifications. Equifax is committed not only to sustain the success VINE has achieved, but to invest in VINE to expand its reach and enhance the service for victims and everyone affected by crime.

VINE was founded in 1994 in response to the murder of a young Louisville woman, Mary Byron. After being incarcerated for raping, assaulting, and stalking Mary, her assailant 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 at close range, killing her instantly. Out of this tragedy, VINE was established to provide peace of mind to victims and their families by providing confidential offender custody status notifications.

Since inception in 1994, VINE has delivered more than 800 million notifications. In 2024 alone VINE users received nearly 22 million notifications and conducted over 298 million offender and defendant searches. VINE has grown to be the nation's leader in victim notification and is the largest notification platform with relationships in 47 states. The VINE solution that victims and their families have come to count on for over 30 years is free to victims and the community at large. Victims are provided many options for receiving notifications and the service is available through phone, text, in-app notifications,

and TTY for the hearing impaired. VINE is tirelessly supported by live operators 24/7 to assist victims 365 days a year. VINE also provides victims and survivors the ability to find local and state resources through a service provider directory. VINE also has the ability to assist victims in other languages based on the needs of a state's unique population.

It is important to note victim information is held strictly confidential. VINE enables users to anonymously check an offender's custody status. VINE does not retain search history or engage in any use of registrant or victim information except as necessary to provide the VINE service.

As you may know, the 2022 State of Maine Victim Needs Assessment was developed by researchers at the Catherine Cutler Institute through the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) within the Department of Health and Human Services. The report notes Maine is the only state that does not have an option for victims to participate in an automated notification system and recommends Maine establish a statewide electronic notification system.

To address this shortfall, VINE has initiated a county pilot program, collaborating with five counties to implement an automated victim notification pilot program. The pilot is being rolled out over four months to ensure the system meets the needs of victims, survivors, victim advocates, and law enforcement in the state. The service is currently implemented in Somerset County and has just gone live this week in Penobscot County. In addition, the VINE service will soon be available for Aroostook County and Two Bridges Regional Jail.

We are meeting with each agency and have identified county stakeholders as part of each agency implementation. Thanks to the dedication and hard work of these agencies, victims in these areas now have, or will soon have, the ability to receive automated notifications and access vinelink.com for search inquiries. Additionally, we've established a victim notification stakeholder committee that meets bi-weekly to discuss the program, review performance measures, address opportunities and challenges, and drive change as needed.

In closing, we strongly support efforts to provide automated notifications as called for in LD 981 and stand ready to help Maine advance the recommendations for an automated victim notification system to enhance safety for victims.

Thank you for your time. I'm happy to answer any questions.