



Maine Sheriffs' Association

"One Team, One Mission"

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March 26, 2025

TESTIMONY OF SHERIFF TROY MORTON MAINE SHERIFFS ASSOCIATION

LD 981 – An Act to Provide Electronic Notification to Victims of Crimes

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee of Criminal Justice and Public Safety. My name is Sheriff Troy Morton. I am the Sheriff of Penobscot County, and I have the privilege of serving as Vice-President of the Maine Sheriffs Association and I am here today on their behalf.

Your Maine Sheriffs have taken the unanimous position of **SUPPORT** for LD 981 – An Act to Provide Electronic Notification to Victims of Crimes.

If you are a victim of domestic assault in the United States, you have the option to receive text message notifications when the perpetrator is released from jail in most states. However, it's important to note that in Maine, victims do not have access to electronic notification services regarding such releases.

If your home or business is burglarized in any state in our country, you can sign up for an electronic notification when the person who conducted the crime is released, except if you live in Maine. If you have a protection order in place, you should be entitled to information related to parties that are incarcerated in Maine's jails. But if you live in Maine, there isn't a system in place to provide electronic release notifications.

In 2020, DHHS hired The Cutler Institute to conduct a state-wide victim needs assessment and their findings were released in the 2022 report, which was distributed to committee members again yesterday by the Maine Sheriffs' Association. One of the prominent needs identified in the report was the lack of electronic notifications for victims of crimes.

There is no question that our archaic system of phone calls or letters is insufficient. The question becomes when is Maine going to catch up with the rest of the country that provides victims with this critical service?

Maine sheriffs have been looking for funding for eight years. When we began this effort, Maine was one of a handful of states that had not yet implemented this service. Since 2019, we remain the only state without electronic victim notification. We have applied for grants and initially pursued VOCA funding, which is used throughout the country for electronic notification. We have valued relationships with agencies that survive on VOCA funding, so we're committed to finding an alternate source of funding.

In our bill, the fiscal note of \$575,000 is a one-time charge that covers implementation in all fifteen jails and two years of product support. Operating the system once it is in place is a feasible cost to jails. It's the implementation cost that we need to launch this service.

We have begun conversations with other valued stakeholders. We acknowledge that this is a significant endeavor and we've launched a pilot project in hopes of developing best practices from our experience with the platform.

It is critical to note that we are not changing the current practices. We are not removing, or replacing services. The current practices for county jails and arresting agencies will not change. Our efforts are to enhance what we currently provide to all victims, witnesses, and family members.

The Penobscot County Jail serves as one of the pilot locations for this electronic notification platform. This platform has demonstrated significant potential in enhancing communication regarding the release of individuals from custody. Initially, the focus was on providing notifications to victims and witnesses, but it has become clear that the system can benefit a broader audience. Family members, treatment providers, attorneys, and individuals with active protection or harassment orders can all be informed promptly through this electronic notification system. Its implementation underscores the importance of prompt communication in various situations, ensuring that those affected are kept informed and safe.

Maine sheriffs recognize the funding challenges lawmakers are facing this session, and we unanimously believe that providing support to victims of crimes in Maine is long overdue. Please vote ought to pass for LD 981.

Thank you for your consideration and I will be happy to answer any questions you have.

An Act to Provide Electronic Notification to Victims of Crimes

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:

Sec. 4. 17-A MRSA §2101, sub-§1-A is enacted to read:

1-A. Electronic notice. "Electronic notice" means a notice delivered by an e-mail, text message or application-based system.

Sec. 5. 17-A MRSA §2106, sub-§2, as enacted by PL 2019, c. 113, Pt. A, §2, is amended to read:

2. Notification of victim. The Department of Corrections or the state mental health institute or the county jail to which the defendant is committed shall keep the victim's written request for a notification under subsection 1 in the file of the defendant and shall notify the victim by written notice in the mail or electronic notice to a telephone number or e-mail address of any impending release as soon as the release date is set or, if the defendant has escaped, by the quickest means reasonably practicable. This notification must be mailed to the address provided in the request or any subsequent address provided by the victim.

Sec. 6. 17-A MRSA §2107, sub-§3, as enacted by PL 2019, c. 113, Pt. A, §2, is amended to read:

3. Method of notification. Notification under subsection 2 must be made by a telephone call or electronic notice either directly to the victim or as provided in subsection 5. In the event that the jail has not succeeded in contacting the victim after the jail has exercised due diligence in attempting to contact the victim, notification of the defendant's release must be made to the law enforcement agency that investigated the report of domestic violence, sexual assault under chapter 11 or stalking. That law enforcement agency shall make a reasonable attempt to notify the victim of the defendant's release on preconviction bail.

Sec. 7. Automated crime victims notification system. The County Corrections Professional Standards Council, as established in the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 5, section 12004-G, subsection 6-D, shall establish an automated crime victims notification system. The system must be used to provide notices of an offender's change in incarceration status or custody and notices regarding criminal justice proceedings considered to be in the best interest of crime victims in this State and public safety. The council shall contract with a commercial real-time automated crime victims notification system intended to develop, support, house and maintain the automated crime victims notification system for use by the Department of Public Safety, the Maine Sheriffs' Association and the Department of Corrections. The contract must require that the contracted entity provide the following:

1. Operating a support center open on a 24-hours-per-day, 7-days-per-week basis;
2. E-mail, text message and application-based capabilities;
3. English and Spanish real-time operations; and
4. Directory or contact information for community-based support services, including but not limited to housing services, mental and physical health resources, domestic violence resources and financial assistance.

Sec. 8. Appropriations and allocations. The following appropriations and allocations are made.

CORRECTIONS, DEPARTMENT OF

Administration - Corrections 0141

Initiative: Provides one-time funding to the County Corrections Professional Standards Council for the development, support and maintenance of the automated crime victims notification system.

GENERAL FUND

2025-26

2026-27

132nd Maine Legislature
An Act to Provide Electronic Notification to Victims of Crimes
L.D.

All Other	\$575,000	\$0
GENERAL FUND TOTAL	<u>\$575,000</u>	<u>\$0</u>

SUMMARY

Current law requires written notice to be made to victims of crimes in the event that a defendant is released on preconviction bail or released or escaped from custody. This bill allows for that notice to be electronic. The bill requires the County Corrections Professional Standards Council to implement an automated crime victims notification system. The automated system provides a victim with timely notices of an offender's change in incarceration status or custody and notices regarding criminal justice proceedings considered to be in the best interest of crime victims in this State and in the interests of public safety. Finally, the bill provides an appropriation of \$575,000 from the General Fund in fiscal year 2025-26 for the purposes of development, support and maintenance of the automated crime victims notification system.