



Sheriff Troy Morton, President

MAINE SHERIFFS' ASSOCIATION

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February 24, 2026

Testimony of Sheriff Troy Morton, LD 981

Senator Rotundo and Representative Gattine, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, and 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 the President of the Maine Sheriffs' Association. I also serve on the Board of Directors for the National Sheriffs' Association.

On behalf of the Maine Sheriffs' Association, I respectfully ask for your support in funding LD 981, An Act to Facilitate the Establishment of an Automated Crime Victim Notification System.

The protection of victims and witnesses is not optional — it is an essential responsibility of our criminal justice system. Providing victims and witnesses with timely, electronic notification of an offender's release from custody significantly improves safety. For many individuals, knowing when someone is released is critical to their personal safety planning and peace of mind.

During the public hearing, the Honorable Senator Beebe-Center posed a powerful and important question: *How is Maine the only state in the country without an electronic victim notification system?* That question underscores the urgency of this legislation.

Following the hearing before the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, a stakeholder group was formed and pilot programs were launched in four county jails: Aroostook, Penobscot, Two Bridges Regional, and Somerset. Stakeholders carefully addressed the concerns raised during both the public hearing and the work session. Clear admissions policies were developed, and safeguards were implemented to ensure that the electronic system would not replace or negatively impact existing statutory victim notification requirements, particularly in domestic violence cases.

The results of the pilot programs demonstrate strong public engagement and need:

Total Notifications: 6,652

Total New Registrations: 5,829

- **Aroostook County:** 377 notifications | 149 registrations
- **Penobscot County:** 4,132 notifications | 4,801 registrations
- **Somerset County:** 443 notifications | 177 registrations
- **Two Bridges Regional:** 1,700 notifications | 702 registrations

These numbers clearly reflect community demand and the value of this system.

VINE — Victim Information and Notification Everyday — is a proven, proactive tool used nationwide within the criminal justice system. It provides real-time release information, ensuring that victims and other concerned individuals are not left unaware of an offender's status. With recent bail reform changes and increasingly unpredictable release timelines, an automated system helps prevent gaps in notification that a manual or annual system may inadvertently create.

While often associated with domestic violence cases, this system benefits far more than one category of victim. Family members, neighbors, and complainants may also register to receive notifications. This is a broad public safety tool designed to enhance transparency and protect our communities.

We respectfully request your support for the one-time implementation cost of \$244,000 and second-year funding of \$124,000 to establish this system statewide in all county correctional facilities.

As a state, we have an obligation to ensure that victims are not the last to know. They deserve access to a system that may quite literally save lives.

The Maine Sheriffs' Association and our stakeholder group respectfully ask for your support of LD 981 and the funding necessary to implement an electronic victim notification system across Maine.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.