

Protecting victims

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Kentucky's Victim Information and Notification System Everyday, or VINE, the automated system that notifies crime victims when their perpetrators have been released, is a national model -- and, very importantly, it is fully funded, and that's a good thing.

Not good, though, is that two of VINE's spinoffs, the VINE Protective Order Service and the VINE Court Victim Notification program, are not assured funding beyond next year. That's scary, considering that thousands of Kentuckians, including more than 47,000 victims of domestic violence, rely on those phone calls and e-mail alerts in the hopes of not being victimized again.

How sad and ironic it would be if any VINE programs were allowed to go unfunded when Kentucky pioneered the VINE movement, which has spawned similar programs in 36 states. The original VINE was born out of a terrible tragedy. Mary Byron, a hairstylist, was shot seven times and killed in Louisville in 1993 by her ex-boyfriend on her 21st birthday. Unbeknownst to the young woman, the man who had been in jail for raping and assaulting her had been bailed out. Ms. Byron's parents agitated for the automated system, which they believed might have saved her life.

The two spinoff programs recently got a reprieve when the legislature amended the VINE law and directed the Justice Cabinet to take \$515,000 from its General Fund account to keep them afloat through the end of the 2011 fiscal year. Marcia Roth, executive director of the Mary Byron Foundation, rightly is "thrilled" by the priority Senate President David Williams gave to keeping the programs going.

Yet, given the likelihood of tight state budgets for the foreseeable future, alternative funding for the spinoffs -- such as hitting up private foundations and checking out whether federal dollars can be secured -- ought to be pursued with an intensity that matches the worthiness of the cause.