

Crime Victims' Ten Core Rights and How They Relate to Victim Notification

Today in America, there are more than 32,000 laws that define and protect the rights of crime victims and survivors. The Victim Information and Notification Everyday (VINE) services provided by Appriss, known as SAVIN in some states, are directly connected to all ten core rights, and can help ensure that victims are informed and aware of their rights, as well as important services that can assist them in the aftermath of crime.

The ten core victims' rights¹ include the following:

1. The right to be treated with dignity and respect.

Such treatment cannot occur unless crime victims are aware of what is happening with their cases and alleged or convicted offenders. "Dignity and respect" also result from crime victims receiving information about available supportive services that can help them cope with the often devastating effects of crime – information that is provided through VINE's information and referral services.

2. The right to notification and information.

Victim notification is often called the "threshold right" for victims – a right from which access to the other core nine rights emanates. Through the VINE service, crime victims and survivors are provided with confidential, timely access to information about the status of their case, and/or the status of their alleged or convicted offender. Such information is critical to helping victims make informed decisions related to what will happen next in their cases, and their lives.

3. The right to be present.

Victim participation in justice proceedings – from bail and preliminary hearings, to court and probation proceedings, to parole hearings – is essential for justice processes to smoothly proceed when victims are needed as witnesses. Allowing their participation also validates that victims have been harmed by crime, and that their presence in proceedings that significantly affect their lives is important. VINE services augment critical victim information that keeps them informed about and involved in justice proceedings related to their cases.

4. The right to be heard.

Notifying victims of case status and the status of the alleged or convicted offender complements justice agencies' efforts to have victims' needs and wishes to be heard – at bail hearings, key preliminary hearings, and through victim impact statements prior to sentencing and at parole release hearings.

5. The right to reasonable protection from intimidation and harm.

Without information about the status of their alleged or convicted offender, as well as case proceedings, crime victims cannot make important decisions related to their personal safety and that of their loved ones. VINE services are key to this decision-making process and, when combined with referrals to supportive services (including safety planning), can help victims make educated choices that can enhance their personal safety.

6. The right to restitution.

Restitution is ordered as a condition of sentencing or adjudication for convicted offenders, and/or as a condition of parole supervision release by paroling authorities. When VINE informs crime victims about the status of a case or offender, it lets them know that any conditions of conviction – including victim restitution – are on record and enforceable. The information and referral services to local victim assistance programs provided by VINE can also link victims and survivors with victim advocates who can help them understand their restitution rights, document their losses for the purposes of victim restitution, and learn how to monitor the status of court- and parole board-ordered restitution.

7. The right to information and referral.

VINE services include the assistance of operators who are available 24-hours-a-day, seven days a week, to provide information and referrals to victim assistance programs across America. VINE operators receive regular training in victim sensitivity and regular updates on the range and scope of victim assistance services in America. While VINE operators are not crisis responders, they can provide immediate referrals to victims in need of support and assistance.

8. The right to apply for victim compensation (for violent crime victims).

The information and referrals services described above include direct referrals to victim compensation programs in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and two U.S. Territories; and to local victim service providers who can help victims complete the documentation necessary for victim compensation applications. Victim compensation can help violent crime victims cope with the many financial losses that are often associated with violent crime.

9. The right to speedy proceedings.

One of the best ways to ensure a victim's right to speedy proceedings is to make sure that the victim knows the status of his or her case and offender, a service that is offered by VINE. While delays in proceedings cannot be directly addressed by VINE, the VINE service can help ensure that a victim is made aware of his or her right to attend proceedings, as well as inform them of the ongoing status of the case.

10. Special rights and protections.

Included in “special rights and protections” are the rights to:

- **Employer intervention:** Since VINE provides victims with notification with timely information about the status of their case and alleged or convicted offenders, it can help victims provide similar timely information to their employers about time that be needed to attend and participate in justice proceedings. Also, the information and referral services provided by VINE can link victims with trained victim service providers who can advocate on their behalf with employers.
- **Prompt property return:** When victims receive information about the status of their cases, it can link them to additional information about how to get back property that has been retained as evidence. In addition, victim advocate referrals provided by VINE can augment this important process.
- **Privacy:** VINE services are completely confidential and provide a secure environment that protects the privacy of the victim. Alleged or convicted offenders have no access to victims’ requests to seek or access VINE services.

¹ Edmunds, Christine and Anne Seymour, (2006). Victims’ Rights chapter, *National Victim Assistance Academy* Text. Washington, DC: Office for Victims of Crime, U.S. Department of Justice.