

Overview of the Victim Services Unit

Vermont Department of Corrections (VTDOC)

The Vermont Department of Corrections (VTDOC) established the Victim Services Unit (VSU) in January 1999 to provide crime victims with information, support, and opportunities to participate in the post-adjudication process. The VSU is dedicated to ensuring that victims, survivors, and their families are heard and supported throughout an offender's post-conviction journey.

Services and Support Provided

The VSU offers a range of services to help victims/survivors navigate the post-conviction process. Key services include:

- **Providing Information:** Sharing general (non-protected) information about an offender's supervision conditions and level of compliance.
- **Release Planning:** Listening to concerns and providing information about an offender's pending release into the community.
- **Parole Notifications:** Notifying victims of listed crimes when an offender becomes eligible for parole consideration.
- **Parole Hearing Support:** Assisting victims/survivors who wish to participate in parole hearings, either by attending or submitting written statements.
- **Restorative Justice Opportunities:** Informing victims/survivors about restorative justice options available through the VTDOC, including Victim Impact Panels, Victim-Offender Dialogues, and the Apology Letter Bank.

The unit also offers automated notifications through the **Vermont Automated Notification System (VINE)**, which keeps victims updated on offender status changes, including parole hearings, releases, and other movements within the system.

Parole Board Participation

Victims have the right to be involved in the parole process. Registered victims will be notified when a supervised individual is up for a sentence review or scheduled to appear before the Parole Board. They may choose to:

- **Appear in person** to make a statement regarding a possible parole release.
- **Submit a written statement** for the Parole Board's consideration.
- **Meet privately with the Parole Board** to express their views without the offender being present.

Structure of the Victim Services Unit

The Victim Services Unit consists of a dedicated team that includes:

- One Director
- One Senior Victim Services Specialist
- Four Victim Services Specialists positioned throughout the state

Together, the team works to ensure that victims/survivors have the resources, support, and advocacy they need during the post-conviction process.

History of the Vermont Automated Notification System (VINE) Victim Information and Notification Everyday

The Vermont Automated Notification System (VINE) was implemented in 2010 to help the Vermont Department of Corrections (DOC) meet its statutory obligation to notify victims of status changes involving the supervised individual in their case.

Since its implementation, DOC has made significant investments to ensure accurate data flow between systems and timely victim notifications. We continue to improve and upgrade the system, focusing on refining the timing and content of notifications to make them clearer and more understandable for victims and survivors.

VINE provides the most up-to-date information on an offender's status. Current custody statuses include: incarcerated, community supervision, parole, release, court notifications, and return to custody. VINE is an important tool that victims can use for safety planning, offering immediate notifications that allow them to take necessary precautions to protect themselves and their families. Each notification includes a contact number, enabling victims and survivors to reach out to the Victim Services Unit (VSU) for further information or clarification on status changes. The VINE line also offers victims the opportunity to speak with someone directly if their questions cannot be answered by an automated message.

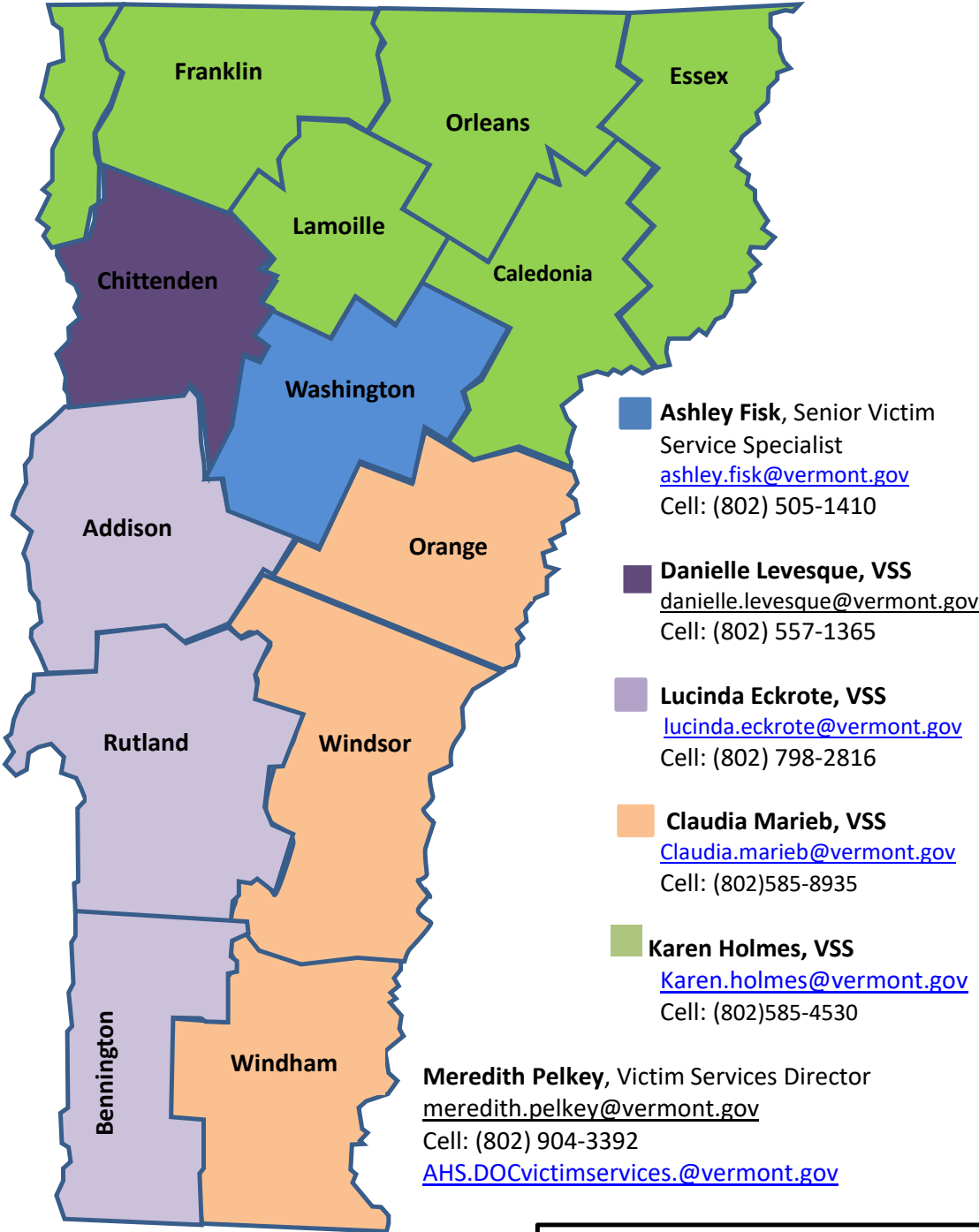
When the statute was created, there was no mechanism for DOC to collect victim information directly. To address this, access to VINE was provided to State's Attorneys' Victim Advocates so they could enter victim contact information into the system. However, this process has its limitations, as there is no consistent expectation of communication or information-sharing.

While the VINE system was originally developed for DOC to meet its statutory obligations, it can be used throughout the entire criminal justice continuum to notify victims of status changes.

See accompanying PowerPoint slides for additional information.

Victim Service Specialist Coverage Areas

Updated July 2024



For victim services assistance, please contact the VSS covering the county where the offender is assigned, or is planning to be released, if they differ. Or contact the Victim Services Director.