



**Department of
State's Attorneys
and Sheriffs**

SAS Victim Advocate Feedback re: Act 159

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Introduction

- Note: State's Attorney Victim Advocates are staffing, on average, about 600 cases per Victim Advocate.
- Earned Time, Education Credits, and the VINE
 - VINE was previously known as Vermont Automated Notification System (VANS)
- Survey Administered between
 - 15 Victim Advocates responded
 - 55% Response Rate
- Statewide Victim Advocate Meeting – 9/11/2024
 - Overview of Survey Results
 - Discussion on results and recommendations



Results

- **Should Earned Time be expanded to include parolees?**
 - Yes: 0 (0%)
 - No: 14 (93%)
 - Decline to Answer: 1 (7%)
- **Should Earned Time be expanded to allow for incarcerated individuals to earn time off their sentence for educational credits they work towards?**
 - Yes: 0 (0%)
 - No: 12 (80%)
 - Decline to Answer: 3 (20%)



Results

- **Do you have confidence in the operation and effectiveness of the Vermont Automated Notification Service (VANS)?**
 - Yes: 2 (13%)
 - No: 12 (80%)
 - Decline to Answer: 1 (7%)
- **Do you think VANS has the ability to effectively handle the expansion of Earned Time?**
 - Yes: 0 (0%)
 - No: 14 (93%)
 - Decline to Answer: 1 (7%)



Qualitative Feedback

- Person 1: "The message that this type of approach would send victims is that **their experience doesn't matter**"
- Person 2: "[there is a] **constant, never-ending frustration, stress, re-victimization and unknowns** that victims of crime here in Vermont face."
- Person 3: "the last legislative change [about Earned Time] **impacted victims and further eroded confidence** in the criminal legal system..."
- Person 6: "[Vermont] continue to provide services and lessen the sentence for defendants while **victims do not receive any benefit from these laws.**"



Recommendations

- **Victim Advocates prefer finality in cases**
 - Recommendation would be to not extend Earned Time to Parole, and not for educational credits
 - Concerns of equity
- **VINE Notifications must be customizable to fit victim's wants in receiving information**
 - Current form provides one uniform notice per type of notification (movement, release, absconding, parole, pardon, etc.)
 - Victims must be given the ability to receive regular updates about an individual's updated release time.



Recommendations cont'd

- **Sentence Calculations, including the total possible earned time, must be made available to victims from the Department of Corrections**
 - SAS Victim Advocates do not have the tools to calculate possible earned time, and cannot give an accurate forecast to victims.
- **Alleviate post-conviction, non-court, victim services from SAS Victim Advocates**
 - Information about parole, probation, incarceration, and earned time eligibility are beyond the means of SAS Victim Advocates.
 - Transfer of cases must occur in a collaborative, but automated, fashion
 - Current practice includes SAS Victim Advocates physically typing in contact information into VINE.



Recommendations final

- **VINE notices must be written in language that is for people who have never interacted with the criminal-legal system**
 - Current notices make many assumptions for people receiving the notice.
- **Full System Education on the role of the SAS Victim Advocate**
 - General expectations by system actors that the SAS Victim Advocate is the "go-to" victim services professional for all victim needs is **not** reflective of means and resources of SAS Victim Advocates.
 - SAS Victim Advocates work cases from the moment a case arrives at the State's Attorney's Office.