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Victim Notification System Launched in Delaware County
PA SAVIN helps crime victims stay informed and safe

Victims of crime in Delaware County can rest easier thanks to a new notification system that helps victims track the status of an offender housed in a county jail. Ultimately, the system provides victims with notification prior to their offender's release from jail.

Delaware County District Attorney G. Michael Green joined County Council Chairman Jack Whelan to announce that Delaware County has joined Pennsylvania's Automated Victim Information and Notification (PA SAVIN) system.

"The purpose of SAVIN is to provide victims of crime, their families and members of the community with information regarding the release, transfer or escape of offenders housed in Delaware County's George W. Hill Correctional Facility, and any county prison across the state," said DA Green.

"We work with victims and victim advocacy groups every day, and this notification system will help victims be more proactive, and more empowered to ensure their own safety. This really enhances the counseling and outreach that victim advocates, such as WAR and the Domestic Abuse Project, already make available."

Victims and members of their families can register with PA SAVIN, which is free, and they will be notified of an offender's release, transfer or escape from most county correctional facilities in the Commonwealth. They can be notified by phone or e-mail, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

DA Green and Council Chair Whelan were joined in announcing SAVIN by representatives from several victims advocacy groups in Delaware County including Women Against Rape, Senior Victim Services, Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, the Domestic Abuse Project and Parents of Murdered Children.

"I am pleased to stand with our victim advocates today to let residents know about this valuable tool to aid our victims of crime," Council Chairman Whelan said.

"It is my hope that the SAVIN program will offer added peace of mind to crime victims and their families. Victims deserve all the help and support we can provide them. This system will help them be in control, to be proactive in protecting themselves, instead of perpetuating the cycle of victimization," Whelan said.

The first victim notification system in the nation was launched in 1994 by Appriss, a Kentucky-based technology company. Appriss created the program following the murder of Mary Byron, a 21-year-old who was shot to death by a violent ex-boyfriend who had been released from jail on rape charges without Byron's knowledge.

Delaware County is one of 61 counties in the Commonwealth that have SAVIN online. It is expected that a similar system for state facilities will be online soon, perhaps as early as Feb. 22.

Implementation of PA SAVIN is a joint project of the Pennsylvania District Attorney Institute and the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. Pennsylvania is one of 13 states to receive funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance within the U.S. Department of Justice to launch a statewide program. There is no cost to the county for implementation of PA SAVIN.

District Attorney Green said PA SAVIN was launched in Delaware County through a team headed by Deputy District Attorney John F.X. Reilly. Donna Mellon, assistant superintendent of the George W. Hill Correctional Facility, said offenders are registered in the system as soon as the intake process is complete upon incarceration and victims are able to register after the intake process is completed.

District Attorney Green said there are more than 1,600 inmates incarcerated in Delaware County, which means that equally as many victims have an interest in knowing the status of their offender.

"Now our job is to let these victims know about SAVIN and to get them enrolled. We are grateful to our local advocacy groups for helping victims and their families learn to use SAVIN," Green said.

"It's also important for Delaware County to support the network's availability throughout the Commonwealth. Many inmates are transferred from county to county and the ability to provide SAVIN across county lines will provide victims and the community at-large with an important tool in the fight against crime."

Andrea Warner, a representative from the Pennsylvania District Attorneys Institute (PDAI), stressed that PA SAVIN is easily accessible to all victims. She said it's easy to register, the system is free,

and it is confidential. Those who wish to register can do so with an automated phone system, an anonymous online system, or with a live operator by phone.

Users can call a toll-free number for live operator assistance. The operators can assist victims who need help obtaining offender information or registering for notification.

Victims who register will be notified of the offender's release up to 24 hours prior to release through an automated phone system or email notification.

Diane Peters, executive director of Senior Victim Services in Delaware County, said she is eager to let the clients she assists know about SAVIN.

"We are really pleased that SAVIN is available in Delaware County. Any time that we can provide victims with knowledge, it empowers them by giving them the ability to make informed decisions," Ms. Peters said. "The sooner victims have access to information, the better prepared and safer they can be. This is a life-saving tool."

Ms. Peters said SAVIN will be helpful to advocates as they inform victims of their case status.

"Our victims are often confused with direct contact with the system," she said. "We are happy to act as the medium to personally provide this information that will benefit victims."

Kim Ferrell, the mother of Faith Sinclair, a teenager killed by a hit-and-run driver, also addressed the audience about the importance of the SAVIN notification system to families of victims.

PA SAVIN complements an existing system operated by the Commonwealth's Office of Victim Advocate.

For Information: People can register for SAVIN by visiting the Web site at www.pacrimevictims.state.pa.us or call the toll-free number at 1-866-972-7284.