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MDOC RECOGNIZES VICTIMS' RIGHTS

JACKSON – Putting money in a state compensation fund; attending parole board meetings; and sending out notifications.

These are some of the ways the Mississippi Department of Corrections assists victims of offenders incarcerated or on supervision.

“Many victims may not know that we offer a variety of services,” Corrections Commissioner Pelicia Hall said. “In observance of National Crime Victims’ Rights Week, I encourage them to take advantage of our services. But they must register in order to benefit.”

As of April 1, MDOC’s Division of Victim Services (DVS) has 9,468 registered victims who receive information including notification of a change in a prisoner’s status, such as releases, deaths or escapes. Also, they receive advocacy support, assistance with complaints, and can request an offender dialogue. Additionally, a Victim Services representative can accompany them to parole board meetings.

Mail-in applications for DVS are available at local District Attorney Offices. Victims also can call (866) 522-4087 toll free or submit a request online at <http://www.mdoc.ms.gov/Victim-Services/Pages/default.aspx> .

Victims registered with DVS, which is a Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grant recipient, are automatically registered with the Office of Mississippi Statewide Automated Victim Information and Notification (SAVIN) Program.

SAVIN provides automated notifications through “VINE” via email, telephone calls, and text messaging, and is TTY capable. Registrants receive real-time status updates, including where offenders are housed. Currently, there are 61,452 active registrations.

Victims must register with DVS to receive services from both SAVIN and DVS. However, if services are needed only from SAVIN, they can register anonymously at www.vinelink.com. If direct assistance is needed, they should contact the Office of MS SAVIN by calling (601) 359-5759 during standard business hours. A VINE Operator also is available after hours at (888) 967-7284 English/Spanish. TTY assistance: 1(866) 847-1298.

The department contributes annually to the Crime Victim Compensation Fund. As of June 2016, the last fiscal year for which data is available, the amount was \$653,052.

The fund, administered through the state Attorney General's Office, reimburses eligible crime victims or next-of-kin for expenses not otherwise covered. For more information about the Crime Victim Compensation Program, call (800) 829-6766 or visit <http://www.ago.state.ms.us/divisions/victim-compensation/>.

“While the Department of Corrections is charged with the security, care, custody, and control of inmates, victims matter to the agency,” Hall said. “Therefore, the agency must balance victims’ rights with inmates’ rights.”