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- (1) Most offenders convicted of felonies in Montana do not go to prison. Judges can sentence offenders to prison, but more often they sentence or "commit" them to the Department of Corrections, which decides the appropriate placement. About 80 percent of DOC commits are placed in (a) secure facilities such as drug and alcohol treatment centers or boot camp, (b) prerelease centers, (c) probation, or (d) the intensive supervision program (ISP). Offenders on ISP wear electronic monitors that track their whereabouts.
- (2) You must register with the Department of Corrections (DOC) if you want to be notified of important events involving offender custody: transfers from one facility to another, parole or sentence review hearings, releases, escapes, and recaptures. Victims have a right to this information, but they must request it! Registering for VINE does not constitute a request for notification from the DOC.
- (3) Victims often experience shock, anger, disbelief and fear initially, and decide that they never want to hear mention of the offender again, so they do not register for notification about custody status changes. This could be a mistake. Victims who stay informed about the whereabouts and custody status of the person(s) who harmed them tell us they feel safer. Victims of violent crimes need to know when the offender returns to their community.
- (4) A prison sentence does not mean your offender will spend that much time in prison. Offenders sentenced to prison are eligible for parole after serving one fourth of the sentence unless the sentencing judge restricts parole eligibility. An offender sentenced to 20 years in prison will be eligible for parole board in 5 years. [Click here to register for notification about parole hearings and other custody status events.](#)
- (5) Do not assume an offender's district court sentence is final. The Sentence Review Commission can change a sentence, resulting in earlier parole eligibility and release dates. The Montana Supreme Court may overturn a district court sentence on appeal. Tell your county attorney that you want to be notified of any appeals or sentence reductions. Montana law guarantees you the right to this information! For a list of county attorneys in Montana, go to <http://www.mtcoattorneysassn.org/CAList.htm>
- (6) The VINE service provides automated custody status updates about offenders only while they are in prison but not in community placements. Once an offender is paroled or released to probation, VINE will no longer call you. Register for VINE but also register with the DOC and the parole board. [Click here to register.](#)
- (7) Deciding to meet face-to-face with your offender might be the biggest gift you can give yourself. Victims who participate in victim-offender dialogue generally find that the process helps them move forward. For more information about the program, call the victim programs manager at (888) 223-6332 or go to [Victim-Offender Dialogue](#).
- (8) Well-meaning friends and family might tell you to move on, forget about what happened, forgive and forget, get over it, or find closure. Victims of crime never forget and closure is a myth. Healing from the trauma of crime is a personal journey that takes time. Trust yourself. Seek the company of people who support you. Consider participating in a restorative justice program through the Department of Corrections. For more information, call the DOC victim programs manager at (888) 223-6332.
- (9) Criminals can change. The person who victimized you might complete treatment and counseling, finish his or her sentence, and become a productive, law-abiding citizen. Offenders under Department of Corrections (DOC) supervision must participate in court-ordered programming tailored to their particular issues: anger management, cognitive principles & restructuring (overturning criminal thinking errors), treatment for drug and alcohol dependency, and sex offender treatment.
- (10) Victims in Montana have the right to be treated with dignity and respect in the criminal justice system. [\(More information about victim rights\)](#)