

HOW IS THE SCHEME ACCESSED?

Participation in the Prisoner Release Victim Information Scheme is entirely voluntary and victims will not be sent unsolicited information about a prisoner's release. It is for the victim to choose if they wish to obtain information about a sentenced prisoner and/or contribute to the temporary release process. Victims will only receive the information which they have requested.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

Safety considerations underpin the entire process and before such information is provided to a victim the Prisoner Release Victim Information Unit will check that a number of important safeguards have been satisfied. These include that:

- the identity of the victim and the legitimacy of their interest in a prisoner's release has been validated by police;
- the release of the information would not threaten the safety of any person;
- we would not be acting contrary to other legislation or take action which would result in a contempt of court; and
- releasing such information would not constitute an unwarranted interference with the rights of the imprisoned offender.

Where it is believed that releasing such information would be in breach of these safety considerations full information will not be provided under the Scheme.



Prisoner Release
Victim Information Scheme

INFORMATION FOR PRISONERS

KEEPING VICTIMS INFORMED
OF PRISONER RELEASES

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INTRODUCTION

As part of the range of services provided to victims of crime, the Government now provides an information scheme on the release of prisoners. The scheme offers victims the opportunity to give and receive information about prisoners who have been convicted of a crime against them. The Prisoner Release Victim Information Scheme is a statutory scheme as provided by sections 68-70 of the Justice (NI) Act 2002 and is administered by the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

This leaflet outlines what the scheme means for prisoners.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR THE INFORMATION SCHEME?

To benefit from the Scheme a person must have been the victim of a crime which resulted in an offender being sentenced to imprisonment.

A victim may be eligible to participate in the Scheme if:

- a. he or she is the victim of the offence for which the offender was imprisoned;
- b. he/she is not the victim but is the next of kin; is an immediate family member; or has a close relationship with someone who has died as a result of the crime; or
- c. he/she is acting on behalf of a victim when that person is unable to act on their own behalf. This would include a close family member or legal guardian on behalf of a child; or, for example, a carer acting on behalf of an ill or incapacitated person.

ARE ALL PRISONERS INCLUDED IN THE SCHEME?

The Prisoner Release Victim Information Scheme only applies to **adult** prisoners sentenced or permanently transferred to serve their sentence in Northern Ireland. An adult prisoner is one aged 18 years or over. Only in certain circumstances are young offenders sentenced to a Young Offenders Centre included in the Scheme. Those circumstances are that the young offender must have been:

- Given the equivalent of a life sentence;
- Convicted of a grave offence; or
- Sentenced to detention in a Young Offenders Centre by the Crown Court.

In addition, the Scheme only applies to prisoners who have been sentenced to a period of 6 months or more. Sentences of less than 6 months are not part of the Scheme. Nor are cases where a prisoner receives a number of sentences of less than 6 months which in total are more than that period. A prisoner must be serving at least one sentence of six months or more to be included within the Scheme.

WHAT INFORMATION CAN VICTIMS RECEIVE?

Information on a prisoner's final discharge or temporary release from prison can be provided.

Information on discharge

A victim can receive information on the prisoner's discharge which includes:

- The month and year in which a prisoner is expected to be discharged;
- Any conditions of release to be imposed;
- Any breaches of those conditions which result in the prisoner's return to custody.

In the case of life sentence prisoners:

- The minimum number of years which the life prisoner must serve;
- When the life prisoner is being considered for discharge; and
- The opportunity to contribute to the consideration of the life prisoner's final release.

Information on temporary release

A victim can also be told of any temporary release the prisoner is granted during the course of his/her sentence. Temporary release in this context means any unescorted release under the provisions of prison rule 27. It does not include those occasions when prisoners are outside the prison under prison officer escort or supervision. Nevertheless, if available, victim views will be considered.

If a victim chooses to receive information about temporary release he/she will be notified when the prisoner is being considered and will be given the opportunity to submit written views to the prison. The prisoner will be notified if a victim chooses to make representations and be entitled to see the victim's comments. Although the prisoner will not be allowed to retain copies of the victim's representations in his cell he will be permitted access to them by making arrangements with the Residential Governor.

The victim's views will be taken into consideration as part of the temporary release assessment process. The victim will then be notified of the outcome and informed of any licence conditions imposed on the prisoner that are relevant to them.