Offender Accountability Letters to Victims

What is an offender accountability letter?

Offenders often have remorse for the harm they caused and would like their victims to know they have accepted responsibility. The Montana Department of Corrections (DOC) allows offenders to write letters to their victims demonstrating their accountability to submit to a letter bank.

The letters are placed in a locked letter bank at DOC. If DOC has your contact information, victim services staff will notify you if the offender has submitted an accountability letter. Each victim decides whether to receive a letter. Many victims want to see what their offenders have to say.

Will my offender find out where I live?

No. The DOC holds victim contact information in strict confidence and would never share it with offenders. The DOC does not allow offenders to mail letters directly to their victims.

Will a letter cause me more pain?

You might experience grief or fear when you read a letter from the offender who committed a crime against you. Most victims who decide to receive a letter report a degree of healing when they hear that the offender is remorseful and is receiving treatment and programming.

What if the offender blames me?

Offenders who participate in the accountability letter process have reached a point in their treatment where they understand they are solely responsible for their circumstances. Accountability letters are reviewed by Victim Services. Abusive letters, including ones that blame the victim, are not accepted.

Am I supposed to forgive?

The decision to forgive is intensely personal. Forgiveness for the offender is not the purpose of an accountability letter. Offenders are discouraged from discussing forgiveness in their letters. Offenders must acknowledge they harmed their victims and they may write about how they intend to change their lives through treatment, programming and self-reflection.

How will I know if the offender has submitted a letter for me?

DOC Victim Services will contact you if we have your current address or phone number on file. We will not send the letter until you ask us to. You may call or email Victim Services to ask if we have a letter for you.

Will the offender know if I accept the accountability letter?

The DOC does not tell offenders if their letters are accepted unless you ask that we do so.

Can I respond to the offender?

If you wish to respond, you may do so through the Accountability Letter Bank. Please do not respond directly to the offender because doing so may cause the offender to violate a court order that forbids contact with you.

Offenders who participate in the letter program have been told not to expect a response from the victim.

Is there a letter for me?

DOC Victim Services will attempt to notify you if your offender deposits a letter for you in the Accountability Letter Program bank. Please provide as much information as you can.

Today's date: _____

Offender: _____

Crime: _____

Crime location: _____

Your name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____

Zip code: _____

Email Address: _____

Signature: _____

Offender Prison Number: _____

Date and year of crime: _____

Court case #: _____

Mail to:

Accountability Letter Bank
Victim Services
Montana Department of Corrections
P.O. Box 201301
Helena, MT 59620-1301

Or email to CORVictimLiaison@mt.gov. For more information, visit cor.mt.gov/victims.

Where is my offender?

The Montana Department of Corrections (DOC) closely monitors the location and custody status of offenders under its supervision. Register for our free, confidential, automated VINE (Victim Information & Notification Everyday) service to track your offender's whereabouts.

To register, call VINE at (800) 456-3076 and follow the instructions, or register online at vinelink.com.

You may also download a free mobile app for your smart phone at itunes.apple.com/us/app/vinemobile/id625472495?mt=8 or play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.appriss.vinemobile.

More than 80 percent of all adult offenders supervised by DOC are in the community rather than prison. Alternatives include probation, parole, drug treatment programs and prerelease centers.

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DOC Victim Services Program
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