



## **News for Immediate Release**

**Aug. 29, 2013**

### **Corrections and OVA Partner on Inmate Apology Bank**

**Harrisburg** – In April 2012, Pennsylvania’s Office of Victim Advocate began a coordinated program with the Department of Corrections called the Inmate Accountability Bank (IAB). Renamed recently to the Inmate Apology Bank, the voluntary program provides an avenue by which crime victims can receive an apology from their offender without having direct contact.

“As of August 2013, the IAB has 537 inmate apology letters submitted and 96 crime victims registered with the program,” Corrections Secretary John Wetzel said. “By registering, the victims are expressing interest in receiving a letter if one is submitted by the offender. Twenty-six registered victims have received an apology letter.”

Prison officials, along with employees of the OVA, work to educate inmates about the program and how to go about writing their letters. Inmates may write to the program, where OVA staff screen the letters for appropriateness and then file them until a registered crime victim indicates that they are interested in receiving letters from their offender. The correspondence is one way – from the inmate to the crime victim.

Crime victims are not the only ones who benefit from the program. The program allows offenders to communicate their apology without violating the DOC’s policy that prohibit them from contacting their crime victims. When an inmate takes time to consider his/her actions, the actions that caused their incarceration, and put those thoughts into words, the process plays a role in their rehabilitation and is a step to accountability.

From a crime victim’s standpoint, receiving the letter from their offender can hold a long-awaited apology. The letters can provide answers to questions not addressed at the trial or sentencing. It is a personal apology to the victims or the victim’s family.

“Not every victim wants to receive a letter. For some victims it is upsetting to dredge up the memories of the crime,” Victim Advocate Carol Lavery said. “The letters are carefully screened by OVA staff to ensure the inmate is not engaging in blaming the victim or any other inappropriate type of context.”

Throughout the process – whether they receive letters or not – crime victims are counseled by OVA staff.

Crime victims interested in this program can learn more by visiting the Office of Victim Advocate website at [www.o.va.state.pa.us](http://www.o.va.state.pa.us), click on "DOC Inmates," and then on "Inmate Apology Bank" or by calling 1-800-322-4472.

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