



**U.S. Department of Justice**

District of Nebraska  
1620 Dodge Street  
Suite 1400  
Omaha, NE 68102  
Phone: (402) 661-3742  
Fax: (402) 661-3086

June 29, 2020

[REDACTED]

Re: United States v. Defendant(s) Austin Thomas  
Case Number 2020R00147 and Court Docket Number 20-CR-00139

Dear [REDACTED]:

The enclosed information is provided by the United States Department of Justice Victim Notification System (VNS). As a victim witness professional, my role is to assist you with information and services during the prosecution of this case. I am contacting you because you were identified by law enforcement as a victim or potential victim during the investigation of the above criminal case.

Charges have been filed against defendant(s) Austin Thomas. The lead prosecutor for this case is Kelli Ceraolo. The main charge is categorized as Postal Service Crimes.

**Due to the large number of victims identified in this case, this office will not be able to continue to send notifications by mail. To continue to receive notifications, please provide your email address on the Victim Internet Site (<https://www.notify.usdoj.gov>) or contact the Help Desk at (866-DOJ-4YOU). Additionally, updates pertaining to this case can be found at <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ne/victimwitness-assistance/information-victims-large-cases>**

Victims of all crimes under federal investigation are entitled to services under the Victims' Rights and Restitution Act (VRRRA), including notification of court events. For further details, please refer to Title 34 United States Code section 20141 or the VRRRA link posted at <https://www.notify.usdoj.gov>.

Now that charges have been filed in federal court, victims of the charges filed are, in addition, entitled to the following rights, according to the Crime Victims' Rights Act, Title 18 United States Code section 3771: (1) The right to be reasonably protected from the accused; (2) The right to reasonable, accurate, and timely notice of any public court proceeding, or any parole proceeding, involving the crime or of any release or escape of the accused; (3) The right not to be excluded from any such public court proceeding, unless the court, after receiving clear and convincing evidence, determines that testimony by the victim would be materially altered if the victim heard other testimony at that proceeding; (4) The right to be reasonably heard at any public proceeding in the district court involving release, plea, sentencing, or any parole proceeding; (5) The reasonable right to confer with the attorney for the Government in the case; (6) The right to full and timely restitution as provided in law; (7) The right to proceedings free from unreasonable delay; (8) The right to be treated with fairness and with respect for the victim's dignity and privacy; (9) The right to be informed in a timely manner of any plea bargain or deferred prosecution agreement; and (10) The right to be informed of the rights under this section and the services described in section 503(c) of the Victims' Rights and Restitution Act of 1990 (34 U.S.C. 20141(c)) and provided contact information for the Office of the Victims' Rights Ombudsman of the Department of Justice.

Please understand that these rights apply only to victims of the counts charged in federal court, and thus you

may not be able to exercise all of these rights if the crime of which you are a victim was not charged. In any event, we will continue to provide you with notifications and services unless you tell us not to. We will make our best efforts to ensure you are provided the rights and services to which you are entitled. You may contact the Victim/Witness Coordinator at the office listed above if you have questions about the progress of your case, your rights or the services to which you are entitled, or how you can assert them during the proceedings. If you believe that a Justice Department employee has not provided you with these rights, you may file a complaint with the Justice Department's Victims' Rights Ombudsman. For more information, go to <http://www.justice.gov/usao/resources/crime-victims-rights-ombudsman>. If you have questions about filing a complaint against an employee, you may contact the Ombudsman by email at [usao.VictimOmbudsman@usdoj.gov](mailto:usao.VictimOmbudsman@usdoj.gov). Questions concerning this case should be directed to office listed above.

It is important to keep in mind that the defendant(s) are presumed innocent until proven guilty and that presumption requires both the Court and our office to take certain steps to ensure that justice is served. While our office cannot act as your attorney or provide you with legal advice, you can seek the advice of an attorney with respect to the rights above or other related legal matters.

Additionally, please be aware that most criminal cases are resolved by a plea agreement between the United States Attorney's Office and the defendant. You should also know that it is not unusual for a defendant to seek to negotiate a plea agreement shortly before a trial is scheduled to begin. Plea agreements can be made at any time and as late as the morning of trial, leaving little or no opportunity to provide notice to you of the date and time of the plea hearing. If the court schedules a plea hearing in this case, we will use our best efforts to notify you of available information as soon as practicable. If you want to inform the prosecutor of your views regarding potential plea agreements, or any other aspect of the case, please contact the prosecutor assigned to this case or me.

Defendant(s), Austin Thomas has been scheduled for his or her first appearance in Court on July 16, 2020, 01:30 PM at in Courtroom 7, Roman L. Hruska Federal Courthouse, 111 South 18th Plaza, Omaha, NE before Judge Susan Bazis. The purpose of this hearing is to advise the defendant of the nature of the criminal charges and to determine if they have an attorney to represent them.

Because of the Court's schedule, hearing dates could change on very short notice. If you plan on attending, you may want to call the VNS Call Center or check the website to confirm the date and time. Please note, there is a 24-hour delay in information transfer to the website.

**Reminder: Please contact our office prior to appearing for this proceeding.** It is not uncommon for the court schedule to change before we can notify you of the change in a timely manner. Your contact may save you an unnecessary trip to court. Email notification is a way to eliminate the delay in time of waiting for regular mail service. Through the Victim Notification System (VNS) we will continue to provide you with updated scheduling and event information as the case proceeds through the criminal justice system. You may obtain current information about this case on the VNS website at <https://www.notify.usdoj.gov> or from the VNS Call Center at 1-866-DOJ-4YOU (1-866-365-4968) (TDD/TTY: 1-866-228-4619) (International: 1-502-213-2767). In addition, you may use the Call Center or Internet to update your contact information and/or change your decision about participation in the notification program.

For many VNS registrants email will provide the most timely notification. VNS does not currently have an email address for you. You can provide VNS an email address by accessing the VNS Internet Web page using the login information provided below. By entering your email as part of the VNS registration process future notifications will be delivered by email, except in rare circumstances when you might also receive a letter from VNS. In order to continue to receive notifications, it is your responsibility to keep your contact information current.

You will use your Victim Identification Number (VIN) [REDACTED] and Personal Identification Number (PIN) [REDACTED] anytime you contact the Call Center and the first time you log into VNS on the website. If you are receiving notifications with multiple victim ID/PIN codes please contact the VNS Call Center. In addition, the first time you access the VNS website, you will be prompted to enter your last name (or business name) as currently contained in VNS. The name you should enter is [REDACTED]

Remember, VNS is an automated system and cannot answer questions. If you have other questions which involve this matter, please contact this office at the number listed above.

Sincerely,

Joseph P. Kelly  
United States Attorney

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JP', is written over a light gray rectangular background.

Jose Palacios  
Victim Witness Assistant

Enclosures

## **COVID-19 Update**<sup>i</sup>

Letter notifications from the Victim Notification System (VNS) may be delayed as a result of the availability of staff at government agencies during the COVID-19 outbreak. The other methods of notification provided by VNS (email, the VNS Internet site, toll-free telephone number) will continue in operation and will provide timely information. If you have not already done so, we suggest you access the VNS web site (<https://www.notify.usdoj.gov>) and enter a verified email address to receive email notifications from VNS. Registrants of VNS with a verified email address will receive the same notification information via email as provided by the VNS letters. Instructions for entering a verified email address in VNS can be found at the bottom of this document.

If you plan to attend a court hearing, prior to the scheduled date of the event, be sure to contact the victim assistance staff at the United States Attorney's Office or check the web site of the U.S. District Court where the hearing is being held (<https://www.uscourts.gov>) for any special guidelines on courthouse and/or courtroom access during the Coronavirus outbreak. Please be aware that access may be limited based on government guidelines or restrictions in the local area.

You may contact the VNS Help Desk at 866.625.1631 for assistance with the registration process or for other help with the internet system. You will need to provide your VIN and PIN when contacting the Help Desk.

### **Instructions for Entering a Verified Email Address in VNS** <https://www.notify.usdoj.gov>

1. If this is the first time you have accessed this site:
  - a. You must enter the VIN/ID and PIN contained in the letter you received from the United States Attorney's Office
  - b. You will also be asked to enter either your last name, or if a business, the business name. The name must be the same as contained in the notification letter.
2. After logging into VNS
  - a. Step 1 - Create a new password. This password can be used in lieu of the VNS PIN when accessing VNS in the future
    1. VNS password must be at least 8 characters and may use letters, numbers, special characters or some combination.
  - b. Step 2 - Provide the answer to a security question
  - c. Step 3 - Enter and confirm your email address
    - i. A confirmation notice will be sent to the email you entered and your email will be "verified"
3. After completing the above steps, you can use your email address, and the password you created in Step 1, to access VNS in lieu of the VIN and PIN.
4. Entering a verified email address in VNS will eliminate letter notifications in the future and all VNS notifications will be provided by email.

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<sup>i</sup> March 2020 – v1