

Connecticut's sex offender registry should be based on risk

By Jillian Gilchrest

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The Department of Emergency Services & Public Protection strives to keep the children of Connecticut safe each and every day. The protection of our youngest and most vulnerable citizens is a top priority to the Department of Emergency Services & Public Protection. The Sex Offender Registry is another important resource that families can use to protect their children and those they care for from individuals with problem sexual behaviors.

The Department of Emergency Services & Public Protection encourages the citizens of Connecticut to work with them to ensure that the information provided on this site is accurate. Report information that you know is not up to date or suspect is wrong. Call the Registry staff to report that a registrant no longer resembles the photo that is displayed or has moved from the address that is listed.

Finally, information on the Sex Offender Registry changes frequently and the public is encouraged to keep track daily of changes in your community by signing up for the free e-mail notification system. The service provides for you to be notified automatically by e-mail when a registered sex offender moves within your neighborhood. Thank you for helping us in keeping Connecticut safe.

Connecticut's sex offender registry should be changed to reflect risk of reoffending, the author writes.

What is the point of a sex offender registry? As a woman and mother of two, I view Connecticut's sex offender registry as a tool to increase public awareness about offenders living among us and to weigh my safety and the safety of those around me.

As a longtime advocate against sexual violence, I recognize that it is the individuals we let into our lives who are most likely to offend, not the stranger in the park or the man walking down the street, although these attacks do occur.

Whether known to us or not, the intention of the registry was to let us know if a person presents a risk to our families and communities and to enable law enforcement agencies to track, supervise and monitor these registrants. Unfortunately, Connecticut's registry is not performing these functions.

Unlike New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and 13 other states, Connecticut's sex offender registry is an "offense-based" rather than a "risk-based" registry. This means that

someone convicted of a crime with a sexual component can arrange a plea deal to avoid being placed on the registry or plea bargain to an offense that carries less registration time. Certain offenses, such as sex trafficking, do not require placement on the registry. The public is not safer if the individuals most at risk of reoffending are not even on the registry.

Since 1998, Connecticut's sex offender registry has grown to more than 6,000 names with no distinction based on the risk to reoffend. With so many people on the registry, it is difficult to provide oversight. Unless an individual is on probation or parole supervision, the only oversight of those on the registry is a quarterly address verification request by mail. There is no in-person contact with law enforcement, and many police departments across the state, especially in our cities, do not have the capacity to follow-up on late or absent mail. With so many sex offenders in an ever-growing registry system, law enforcement resources become overstretched and the ability of the public to differentiate high risk offenders is undermined.

There are multiple instances in recent years to illustrate how the lack of a risk-based registry allows dangerous offenders to go unsupervised and to reoffend, committing [rape](#), murder, and [sexual assault](#). At the other end of the spectrum are individuals who are least likely to reoffend. While their crimes and the harm they perpetrated should never be minimized, sex offender treatment experts argue that being listed on the registry can negatively impact a person's chances for long-term success. Evidence and logic suggest that in many ways registries contradict best practices in criminal justice re-entry reforms and actually hurt public safety.

We have an opportunity to make changes to the criminal justice system that are victim-centered, are based in best-practices and will improve community safety. Clearly, the diverse objectives of policy need to be carefully considered. Social reintegration and rehabilitation needs of offenders must be balanced with victims' rights and concerns. While community safety is what is most important, punishments should be applied in a cost-effective manner with the response being proportionate to criminal behavior.

The public registry should be reserved for high-risk sex offenders, based on risk of reoffending, so that members of the public can be better informed, especially about predatory and violent sex offenders at high risk to reoffend. At the same time, collateral consequences could be minimized for lower risk individuals reintegrating into society to become productive, law-abiding citizens.

The legislature required the Connecticut Sentencing Commission to study how to best improve Connecticut's sex offender registry and submit proposed changes by 2018. Now, two years later, the legislature has yet to implement the commission's recommendation to move to a risk-based registry. Connecticut is the land of steady studies, which is good — as long as we implement the findings of that research.

I recognize that it is a short session and an election year, but the Connecticut General Assembly must act. Let's make our state's sex offender registry the tool it was intended to be and make communities safer for Connecticut families.

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