A Position on the Sex Offender Registry – An Alternative Approach

CURE takes the position that sex offender registries be abolished. Present laws have rarely assisted in prevention of an abusive situation. Approximately 90% of all sex offenses are committed by a family member or close acquaintance[1]. Recidivism rates of less than 5%, by convicted sex offenders[2], certainly mitigates against the efficacy of the tremendous expenditure for the registries.

Registration results in severe collateral consequences such as unemployment, homelessness, and often physical and humiliating attacks on registrants, their property, and families.

The sex offender registry has resulted in registrants and their families facing significant obstacles in building a life for themselves after incarceration. One of the best methods of prevention should be a positive life for a former sex offender – being on the registry can bring on some of the same characteristics that led the person into an abusive life in the past. Registration laws actually *decrease* public safety by making it more difficult for former offenders to reintegrate into society, ultimately increasing their likelihood of reoffending.

Our nation needs to change the presumptions that have led to such hysteria in thinking there is so much sexual abuse by those previously convicted. That theory has been fueled by "law and order" and "get tough on crime" approaches which have failed. It has taken on a mentality like the Salem witch trials of the past, or the infamous Japanese interment camps during World War II that were created out of fear. They are as ineffective and damaging as the infamous "war on drugs" where other failed policies were applied to another group. And many benefitted from an industrial complex that developed, just as the present development with the sex offender registry industry.

Instead of producing a sense of safety, it has fostered and perpetuated a sense of fear amongst an uneasy public and inhibited positive, proactive discussion around the causes that can lead to an abusive circumstance – causes that have nothing to do with how far away someone lives from a school or bus stop, or whether they are permanently rendered pariahs by a modern scarlet letter. These registries promote hatred and retaliation against former offenders, their families, and even their victims at times. It is counterproductive to enact such registries.

It is imperative that legislative bodies effectively address the problem and rescind, or seriously refine, the laws that are harmful and are not assisting in sex abuse prevention. It is time to take a smart approach, not a hysterical one.

By eliminating the registry, those resources saved could be re-directed to a concerted effort to educate the public – including media, social networks, and lawmakers – regarding the nature of sexual offenses and how to protect children and the vulnerable from such activity. Sexual abuse is foremost a public health problem and cannot be effectively solved through the criminal justice system, as we have seen. The elimination of the registry will allow former sexual offenders to more effectively reintegrate into society.

CURE adamantly believes in the abolition of the sex offender registry as a wasteful, punitive, hateful, and an ineffective example of political pandering. 09/12

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[1] U.S.Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Sexual Assault of Young Children as Reported to Law Enforcement: Victim, Incident, and Offender Characteristics,* July 2000, NCJ 182990, table 4 and table 6.

[2] Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2003). *Recidivism of sex offenders released from prison in 1994* (No. NCJ 198281). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.