

Sex Offenders - Overview & Outlook

Overview

As of April 2, 2008, there was a total of 19,890 registered sex offenders, including 13,196 Level 1 offenders, 3,201 Level 2 offenders and 1,609 Level 3 offenders, wandering the streets of Washington state, many of whom are considered "homeless." It also includes 1,423 offenders who have not verified their addresses with the sheriff as required and the sheriff has been unable to locate them.

Sex offenders are some of the worst criminals around. They prey on children, vulnerable adults and commit horrid acts of rape and molestation against them. Sexual abuse of helpless children and adults is one of the most terrifying and demeaning criminal acts an individual can perpetrate against another. The personal pain and fear suffered by the innocent victims of sexual abuse, and by their families, have devastating impacts that often take years, if not a lifetime, to overcome. This has led to confusion as to why these perpetrators are even on the streets.

The Department of Corrections (DOC) and the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) are the two agencies responsible for the custody of most sex offenders. Although many people think sex offenders should be locked away for life, Washington state has a patchwork of sex offender sentencing laws on the books, depending on when an offender committed his crime.

In 1990, Washington became the first state in the nation to pass a comprehensive public notification and mandatory registration law for sex offenders. Washington also established the civil commitment process, which forces dangerous sex predators who finish their prison terms into intensive confinement and treatment instead of release back into the community. Since 1990, Washington has enacted stricter punishments for sex offenders. Other states have looked to Washington as a model for methods of punishing sex offenders. Following is a brief overview of current state laws and recent legislative enactments pertaining to sex offenders.

Outlook

While our communities can breathe a little easier with the most dangerous sex offenders convicted after 2001 sentenced and potentially imprisoned for life, housing sex offenders moving from the SCC to a SCTF and back into the community will continue to cause public concern. While most if not all of these offenders should be locked up for life, many have already served their sentences as handed down under the law at the time of their convictions. It is incumbent on the community to be vigilant when a sex offender moves into their neighborhood. House Republicans should continue to support measures increasing the number of sex crimes subject to long sentences, including life on the first conviction for the most heinous sex offenses, increasing penalties for failing to register as a sex offender, and increasing restrictions on the SSOSA program so that sex offenders who commit sex crimes against children will pay for their acts with harsh prison sentences, not lenient treatment alternatives.