

Testimony for House of Representative Judiciary Committee
March 17, 2011

Re: Sex Offender Registration Act

I am a long time child welfare caseworker/therapist. I have eleven years of experience in working with juvenile delinquents with a history of sexual offense. I have provided sex offender and relapse prevention therapy to many youth placed within the foster care system. Many of these young teens need to register. In some cases I find that the registry is necessary and a valid source for holding these young men accountable however in the majority of cases I find that the registry is a hindrance to their success. Recently I have been working with a young man who is an excellent student and a talented athlete. He has completed treatment and is assessed to be low risk. He has committed no offenses since his original conviction yet he pled to a charge which requires a lifetime of registering. He is a young man that is eligible and capable to compete in college athletics. At the beginning of the school year he was told he could not live on campus at the school that he was to attend. He joined the wrestling team and was doing decently in both school and athletics. Most recently he was arrested for failing to comply with the sex offender registration act. Not because he failed to update his address but because he did not inform the State Police that he was attending an institution of higher learning. This young adult began registering when he was 14 without a thought to higher education at the time. He was advised by me and the other adults in his life to disclose his offense to the school, which he did. He simply did not know he needed to inform the police of his attendance on campus. This recent charge is a possible punishment of a 4 year felony. The incident led to this young man's life being exposed to three different newspapers including his entire campus. He was dismissed from his sports team and his life was turned upside down.

Another young man I have been working with for 4 years was written up by the police for attending a basketball game along with his foster father at his high school. This apparently is considered loitering and against the school safety zone policies related to the sex offender act. Not only is it concerning that he cannot participate in normal student activities, it was further concerning that his probation officer and the on-campus police did not realize that this was an offense. These young offenders at the ages of 14 and under are not appropriately advised and those who are to advise and enforce are also not current on the law. These young men are informed of their responsibilities at a young age and asked to sign legal documents that they do not understand. This young man is an honor roll student slated to attend college this fall. He is at low risk to reoffend having completed treatment with no offense since, yet he is not able participate as a normal student in his own high school and has to face not attending his own prom, senior party and possibly his own graduation. His entire student body is aware of his placement on the registry and as we all know teens are often cruel. This teen has endured ridicule and taunting.

These stories are two of many young men who cannot be a fully participating student, attend the colleges they desire, pursue the careers they desire or live in many

communities. These stories are two of many young men who made poor decisions at an age where their knowledge and education in regards to sex was limited. These stories are two of many young men who made decisions based upon the poor environmental conditions that they were raised in and on occasion situations the State of Michigan put them in. Many juvenile offenders are products of their environment and often have commit offenses that were done to them. They were not taught the difference between right and wrong. They were victims and we continue to victim them by labeling them and taking away their opportunity to be successful citizens.

The Sex Offender Registry for Juveniles is often a life sentence that they do not deserve. Due to the many services offered within the State many of these teens successfully complete treatment and are at a low risk to reoffend. The recidivism rate for juvenile offenders whom have completed treatment is significantly lower than that of adults. I am not in favor of abolishing the Sex Offender Registry but might there be some way to let Courts have discretion upon the completion of treatment as to whether it is necessary for a juvenile to register or not? Or might it be considered to have Juveniles not be placed on the public registry unless there is a re-offense? Other states have less stringent rules in regards to registering and limit the years of registering for juvenile offenders.

Furthermore in the cases that juveniles are required to continue to register, it is imperative that law enforcement, judges and probation officers are fully aware of the entire law and registration responsibilities. It should be considered that these juveniles are often dismissed from their probation at a young age and may not have strong guardian figures in their life. It seems that their responsibilities should be reviewed with them again when they reach eighteen. Arresting these young adults who were ill advised of their responsibilities further hinders their lives and often is a waste of Law Enforcement time and tax payer monies.

I am concerned that the Sex Offender Registration is not protecting people but inducing fear, hatred and hopelessness. These Juveniles already have so many challenges that await them in life and labeling them makes it even more difficult to meet the challenges with positive motivation. My life for several years now has been committed to better the world by helping a handful of teens each year pursue their successes in life. The State of Michigan could assist by analyzing the success of the registry against the damage it brings to these teens lives.

.Thank you for you attention to this matter.

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