

Sex Offenders

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Abstract: In response to horrific sex crimes against children, Congress and the states have passed hundreds of new laws in recent years to crack down on offenders. In addition to much longer sentences and more rigorous tracking of sex criminals upon release, some of the new laws place limits on where offenders can live, banning them from neighborhoods surrounding schools, parks and playgrounds. But critics warn the laws may prove counterproductive, driving sex offenders further underground. They also point out that most perpetrators are family members or other acquaintances of victims, so the new laws may shift resources away from treatment programs that could help more. Moreover, experts note sex offenders' low recidivism rates and a dramatic drop in child sexual-abuse cases. But with the media giving heavy coverage to the worst cases of abduction and abuse, it's no wonder that lawmakers are willing to approve any punishment or tracking technique that promises to prevent crimes against children.

Alan Greenblatt has been writing about politics and government in Washington and the states for more than a decade. As a reporter at *Congressional Quarterly*, he won the National Press Club's Sandy Hume award for political journalism. Since joining the staff of *Governing* magazine, he has covered issues of concern to state and local governments, including budgets, taxes, and higher education. Along the way, he has written about politics and culture for numerous publications, including the *Washington Post* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

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