

August 30, 2018

Pennsylvania State Capitol  
501 North Third Street  
Harrisburg PA 17120

Pennsylvania General Assembly  
House of Representatives  
Judiciary Committee  
P.O. Box 202105  
Harrisburg PA 17120



*Note: Please email [ann@atsa.com](mailto:ann@atsa.com) to receive an electronic version of this letter with links to all referenced materials.*

The Honorable Judiciary Committee Chair Ron Marsico and Committee Members:

**Regarding House Bill 2507**

The Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA) is a 3,000-person international association dedicated to the elimination of sexual abuse through sound research, effective practice, informed policy, and comprehensive prevention strategies. Our member chapters include the Mid-Atlantic Region Chapter (MARATSA), which represents treatment providers, researchers, corrections officials, and victim advocacy groups in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, and Washington, D.C. We are writing to you in regard to House Bill 2507.

HB 2507, as introduced, prohibits registered sex offenders from living within 5,000 feet from any public, parochial, or private school or preschool for the duration of their registration. HB2507 applies to both adults and juveniles, for whom registration can range from 15 years to life. ATSA and MARATSA applaud the intent of this bill to promote public safety. Sexual abuse is a horrific crime with the potential to cause long-term trauma and harm to those who are abused. Unfortunately, this bill, as written, may create several unintended consequences that do nothing to increase public safety while actually increasing problems such as homelessness.

Consider these facts:

- According to the U.S. Department of Justice and all recent research, the majority of children (90-95%) who are sexually abused are assaulted by someone they know and trust (e.g., a family member, family friend, babysitter, coach, teacher, or minister), not by a stranger. Residence restrictions, however, are based on the faulty assumption that the majority of people who sexually offend do so against strangers. But, as research consistently demonstrates, this is not true. For that reason, residence restrictions do little to protect children. In fact, such restrictions have the unintended consequence of taking society's attention and resources away from identifying and stopping abuse where it is most likely to happen. A more appropriate approach to protecting children, given what we know about how abusers target their victims, is to inform parents and children about the concept of consent, setting appropriate physical boundaries, and

understanding how to safely intervene, and to provide comprehensive education at all grade levels so that all parents and children know how to recognize, stand up to, and report the grooming behaviors of would-be abusers, most of whom are individuals known to the parents and child.

- Research also shows that restricting residence locations for registered sex offenders does not make communities safer. (See attachment 3.) Rather than increasing community safety by assisting offenders to reintegrate productively into the community upon release, residence restrictions can have the unintended negative consequences of eroding and weakening the protective factors that reduce the likelihood of sexual reoffending. Residence restrictions can:
  - Reduce offenders' access to the prosocial support groups, treatment programs, and other services aimed at helping them address the underlying causes of their offending behaviors in order to remain crime-free, and are particularly harmful when applied to youth offenders who may be forced out of their local school and away from positive peer groups and role models;
  - Reduce offenders' ability to find housing and work, which destabilizes their efforts to build productive and crime-free lives; and
  - Increase poverty and homelessness among offenders and their families. The most obvious example of the problems created by residence restrictions is in Miami-Dade County, Florida, where restrictions prohibiting registered sex offenders from living within 2,500 feet of schools, day care centers, parks, and playgrounds – just half the distance proposed by HB2507 – have created large homeless communities that pose health and safety hazards, have a negative impact on local businesses, and are a burden on the law enforcement agencies charged with monitoring individuals on the registry. (See attachment 2.)

There are approximately 21,500 registered sex offenders in Pennsylvania, about 1 in every 600 residents. The social impact of restricting such a large percentage of the state's population from living closer than 1 mile from schools has the potential to cause major disruption among communities. This disruption will increase over time as more individuals are added to registries and few leave. This constant growth in registry numbers will tax the resources of local and state law enforcement and community services systems. Rather than becoming productive, tax-paying members of society, individuals facing residence restrictions frequently end up receiving government-funded social services, being a burden on society, and having an increased risk for committing new non-sexual crimes. A more effective approach is to eliminate one-size-fits-all residence restrictions and move to a case-by-case system of management that matches services and sanctions to each individual's risk to reoffend, thus maximizing community safety and making the most effective use of scarce resources.

- Finally, research consistently has shown that the rate of sexual recidivism ranges from 1% to 15% during the first five years after release for individuals convicted of sexual crimes, and continues to drop after that, eventually approaching zero. This is lower than for any crime but murder. Because the re-offense rate already is so low, residence restrictions do nothing to lower it further and have the unintended consequence of creating destabilization rather than facilitating reintegration, thus increasing the risk that offenders will face homelessness and require social service assistance. Rather than using a failed policy of a one-size-fits-all registration and residence system that has so many unintended negative consequences, a more effective solution would be to closely monitor those sexual offenders who are identified through

validated methods to present a high risk to commit another sexual assault, and focus on appropriate treatment and sanctions for them.

We all share the goal of making society safer and ending sexual abuse. ATSA and MARATSA offer their services to your Committee to help develop informed and evidence-based policies and statutes that achieve these shared goals. We support and hope to be able to assist your Committee in developing cost-effective approaches to successfully managing and treating individuals convicted of sexual crimes. We can arrange for access to local and national experts as well as to a variety of practice guidelines and informational materials. (See attachment 1.) For more information and assistance, please send an email to [ann@atsa.com](mailto:ann@atsa.com).

Sincerely,



Maia Christopher  
Executive Director  
Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers



Alison Hall  
Executive Director, Pittsburgh Action Against Rape  
Board Member, Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers



Stacey Huffman  
Board President  
Mid-Atlantic Region Chapter of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers

## Attachment 1

The following materials have been produced by ATSA to provide information about best practices related to the treatment and management of individuals who have sexually offended or are at risk to do so. Copies of these items can be requested by sending an email to [ann@atsa.com](mailto:ann@atsa.com).

### Publications

- ATSA Practice Guidelines for Assessment, Treatment, and Intervention with Adolescents Who Have Engaged in Sexually Abusive Behavior (2017)
- ATSA Practice Guidelines for the Assessment, Treatment, and Management of Male Adult Sexual Abusers (2014)
- Report of the Task Force on Children with Sexual Behavior Problems (2006)

### Fact sheets

- What is sexual abuse? (2017)
- Who commits sexual abuse? (2017)
- Who is sexually abused? (2017)
- Is sexual abuse a public health issue? (2017)
- Fast facts about adults who have sexually offended (2017)
- Fast facts about adolescents who have sexually offended (2017)
- Fast facts about children who display problematic sexual behaviors (2017)
- Controversial issues with sexually violent predator (SVP) laws: A guide for professionals (2015)
- Sexual offender residence restrictions (2014)
- The registration and community notification of adult sexual offenders (2010)
- Sex offender registration and notification (2008)

## Attachment 2

The following articles highlight problems created in Miami-Dade County, Florida, by the residence restrictions imposed on individuals on the sex offender registry. Registered sex offenders in Miami-Dade County may not live within 2,500 feet of schools, day care centers, parks, or playgrounds.

- [Inside the secret community dubbed Miracle Village where 100 child sex offenders live in isolation cut off from normal society \(1-16-2018\)](#)
- [A residential ministry deals with the sex offender registry \(1-23-2018\)](#)
- [Miami-Dade will close sex offender camp by May 6, threatens jail time for stragglers \(4-27-2018\)](#)
- [Miami-Dade enforcing weekend deadline for homeless sex offenders to move from Hialeah tent area \(5-4-2018\)](#)
- [Homeless sex offenders are getting kicked out of their South Florida encampment. Now what? \(5-5-2018\)](#)
- [Kendall residents outraged over possible relocation of sex offenders \(5-6-2018\)](#)
- [Officials give final notice to homeless sex offenders living in encampment \(5-6-2018\)](#)
- [Homeless sex offenders lose court fight to keep Hialeah tent camp. Where to next? \(5-10-2018\)](#)
- [Police now shuffling tent city sex offenders around Miami-Dade \(5-24-2018\)](#)

### Attachment 3

The following abstracts reflect research, publications, and presentations by ATSA members related to the effectiveness and consequences of sex offender registries and residence restrictions. Individuals interested in receiving complete copies of the research should send an email to [ann@atsa.com](mailto:ann@atsa.com).

- [Effects of juvenile sex offender registration on adolescent well-being: An empirical examination:](#) Letourneau, Harris, Shields, Walfield, Ruzicka, Buckman, Kahn, & Nair (2018)
- [Juvenile registration and notification policy effects: A multistate evaluation project:](#) Letourneau, Sandler, Vandiver, Shields, & Nair (2018)
- [Long-term recidivism studies show that desistance is the norm:](#) Hanson (2018)
- [Sex offender management policies and evidence-based recommendations for registry reform:](#) Levenson (2018)
- [Attitudes towards sexual offenders: What do we know, and why are they important?:](#) Harper, Hogue, & Bartels (2017)
- [Juvenile sexual crime reporting rates are not influenced by juvenile sex offender registration policies:](#) Sandler, Letourneau, Vandiver, Shields, & Chaffin (2017)
- [Release from the sex offender label:](#) Kahn, Ambroziak, Hanson, & Thornton (2017)
- [An evidence-based perspective on sexual offender registration and residential restrictions:](#) Levenson (2016)
- [Collateral consequences of juvenile sex offender registration and notification: Results from a survey of treatment providers:](#) Harris, Walfield, Shields, & Letourneau (2016)
- [Grand challenges: Social justice and the need for evidence-based sex offender registry reform:](#) Levenson, Grady, & Leibowitz (2016)
- [The Adam Walsh Act: An examination of sex offender risk classification systems:](#) Zgoba, Miner, Levenson, Knight, Letourneau, & Thornton (2016)
- ["Brothers under the bridge": Factors influencing the transience of registered sex offenders in Florida:](#) Socia, Levenson, Ackerman, & Harris (2015)
- [Measuring public perceptions of sex offenders: Reimagining the Community Attitudes Toward Sex Offenders \(CATSO\) scale:](#) Harper & Hogue (2015)
- [Should we worry about sex offenders who deny their offences?:](#) Craissati (2015)
- [The Adam Walsh Act: An examination of sex offender risk classification systems:](#) Zgoba, Miner, Levenson, Knight, & Thornton (2015)
- [The emotional representation of sexual crime in the national British press:](#) Harper & Hogue (2015)
- [Where for art thou? Transient sex offenders and residence restrictions:](#) Levenson, Ackerman, Socia, & Harris (2015)

- [Attitudes towards sex offenders in Canada: Further validation of the CATSO-R factor structure:](#) Corabian & Hogan (2014)
- [Catch me if you can: An analysis of fugitive sex offenders:](#) Levenson, Ackerman, & Harris (2014)
- [Collateral punishments and sentencing policy: Perceptions of residence restrictions for sex offenders and drunk drivers:](#) Levenson, Shields, & Singleton (2014)
- [Registered sex offenders in the United States: Behind the numbers:](#) Harris, Levenson, & Ackerman (2014)
- [Sex offender residence restrictions: The law of unintended consequences:](#) Levenson & Zgoba (2014)
- [Transient sex offenders and residence restrictions in Florida:](#) Levenson, Ackerman, Socia, & Harris (2013)
- [An integrative theory of desistance from sex offending:](#) Senkans, Ward, & Willis (2012)
- [Effectiveness of residence restrictions in preventing sex offense recidivism:](#) Nobles, Levenson, & Youstin (2012)
- [Failure-to-register laws and public safety: An examination of risk factors and sex offense recidivism:](#) Levenson, Sandler, & Freeman (2012)
- [How many sex offenders really live among us? Adjusted counts and population rates in five U.S. states:](#) Ackerman, Levenson, & Harris (2012)
- [The impact of community notification on sex offender reintegration: A quantitative review of the research literature:](#) Lasher & McGrath (2012)
- [The prevalence and correlates of depression and hopelessness among sex offenders subject to community notification and residence restriction legislation:](#) Jeglic, Mercado, & Levenson (2012)
- [Who are the people in your neighborhood? A descriptive analysis of individuals on public sex offender registries:](#) Ackerman, Harris, Levenson & Zgoba (2011)
- [Do sex offender registration and notification requirements deter juvenile sex crimes?:](#) Letourneau, Bandyopadhyay, Armstrong, & Sinha (2010)
- [Effects of South Carolina's sex offender registration and notification policy on adult recidivism:](#) Letourneau, Levenson, Bandyopadhyay, Sinha, & Armstrong (2010)
- [Effects of South Carolina's sex offender registration and notification policy on deterrence of adults sex crimes:](#) Letourneau, Levenson, Bandyopadhyay, Armstrong, & Sinha (2010)
- [Evaluating the effectiveness of sex offender registration and notification policies for reducing sexual violence against women: Final Report for the National Institute of Justice:](#) Letourneau, Bandyopadhyay, Sinha, & Armstrong (2010)
- [Failure to register as a sex offender: Is it associated with recidivism?:](#) Levenson, Letourneau, Armstrong, & Zgoba (2010)

- [Introduction to special issue on sex offenses and offenders: Toward evidence-based public policy](#): Harris & Lurigio (2010)
- [Views of sexual abuse professionals about sex offender notification policies](#): Levenson, Fortney, & Baker (2010)
- [Widening the net: The effects of transitioning to the Adam Walsh Act's federally mandated sex offender classification system](#): Harris, Lobanov-Rostovsky, & Levenson (2010)
- [Circles of Support and Accountability: A Canadian national replication of outcome findings](#): Wilson, Cortoni, & McWhinnie (2009)
- [Collateral damage: Family members of registered sex offenders](#): Levenson & Tewksbury (2009)
- [Examining the impact of sex offender residence restrictions on housing availability](#): Zgoba, Levenson, & McKee (2009)
- [Sex offender residence restrictions](#): Levenson (2009)
- [Stress experiences of family members of registered sex offenders](#): Tewksbury & Levenson (2009)
- [Collateral consequences of sex offender residence restrictions](#): Levenson (2008)
- [Megan's Law and its impact on community re-entry for sex offenders](#): Levenson, D'Amora, & Hern (2007)
- [Public perceptions about sex offenders and community protection policies](#): Levenson, Brannon, Fortney, & Baker (2007)
- [Sex offender residence restrictions: Sensible policy or flawed logic?](#): Levenson, Zgoba, & Tewksbury (2007)
- [Sex offender residence restrictions: Unintended consequences and community reentry](#): Levenson, University, & Hern (2007)
- [When evidence is ignored: Residential restrictions for sex offenders](#): Tewksbury & Levenson (2007)
- [The effect of Megan's Law on sex offender reintegration](#): Levenson & Cotter (2005)
- [The impact of sex offender residence restrictions: 1,000 feet from danger or one step from absurd?](#): Levenson & Cotter (2005)
- [Policy interventions designed to combat sexual violence: Community notification and civil commitment](#): Levenson (2004)
- [Attitudes toward prisoners and sexual offenders](#): Hogue (1993)