

Posted on Tue, Mar. 21, 2006

AS I SEE IT

Safeguards against child abuse

By Margaret Bullens Special to The Star



Bullens

This congressional session has the potential to be one of the best ever to protect kids from sex offenders.

Sexual violence against kids is one of the biggest social problems today, shattering the innocence of thousands of children each year and leaving in its wake devastating long-term personal and societal consequences.

By age 18, one in three girls and one in six boys will have personally faced the emotional and physical trauma of sexual violence, including rape, molestation, exploitation or child pornography.

The societal costs of this shattered innocence are huge and long-lasting. The National Sexual Violence Resource Center estimates these annual costs:

- \$859 million in lost productivity.
- \$4.1 billion on health care and mental health services for victims.
- \$6 billion in incarceration of convicted perpetrators.

Congress is considering several bills on the issue:

- The Safe Now Act (HR 4815) is the first ever bill to explore the varying levels of risk posed by registered sex offenders. It would create a national task force to study risk assessment to recommend a classification structure for the sex-offender registry. We would then know what kind of resources and monitoring are needed for sex-offender management, focusing on strategies to protect the public from the most dangerous offenders.
- The Cops for Kids Act (HR 4828) would increase law enforcement resources to monitor the activities of sex offenders more effectively.
- The Children's Safety Act and Violent Crime Reduction Act (HR 4472) would increase punishments for sex offenders and further improve sex-offender management.

Sexual violence is not the easiest topic to talk about. Some people want to act as if it is not there or suggest that someone else is responsible for a solution. Others refuse to think that adults so close and trusted by vulnerable young kids would do the kinds of things that are done all too often.

The bottom line is that it is an immense problem that needs the commitment, involvement and resources of many to make a difference and end the shattered innocence of kids.

Our kids deserve protection more than anyone else. Let's start now.

Margaret Bullens is the founder of Safe Now Project, a national nonprofit organization based in Trenton, Mo., working to prevent sexual violence against children. She lives in Humphreys, Mo.
