


Safe NOW Project recommends a task force to create National Sex Offender Risk-based Classification Standards



Classification standards are important because they (1) dictate the scope and level of active monitoring and community notification by law enforcement—prioritizing limited funding and enforcement resources on sex offender who pose the greatest risks to the community; (2) provide a meaningful way for the public to understand the risks of this heterogeneous population; (3) enhances the current national registry with a national empirical risk-based classification scale; (4) may reduce risks to the community by motivating unsupervised offenders to continue sex offender treatment programs; (5) reduces the unintended consequences of the current "Megan's Law", and (6) addresses all of the public policy recommendations identified by experts who work with sex offenders. --Margaret Bullens, Founder of Safe NOW Project

a bill to create a Task Force to recommend National Sex Offender Classification Standards

Why Needed?

Efforts need to be made to create a risk classification scale that is empirically based.

Meaningful levels of risk will improve the public and criminal justice system's understanding of the registered sex offender population

Proactive effort to match level of monitoring and intervention by level of risk

Not all sex offenders present the same levels of risk to the community.

Addresses some of the concerns by critics of the current Megan's Law

In some states, including CA, most registered sex offenders have no form of supervision or treatment. They have no restrictions around where they choose to live or work. They are not prohibited from contact with children, including their victims, nor are they prohibited from risks posed by accessing pornography. Most do not continue in treatment beyond the term of their probation or parole. MOST continue to engage in high risk sexually deviant and illegal behaviors.

National Sex Offender Classification Standards can motivate some offenders to voluntarily return to treatment and active monitoring as a way to lower their classification risk category--based on their demonstration of non-offending, lower risk behaviors.

May provide sex offenders motivation to seek out additional treatment resources and remain crime free--in an effort to reduce their identified level of risk (over time)

If we are going to be serious about managing registered sex offenders, we must also address the hundreds of thousands of registered sex offenders who are not under court supervision. Unless new strategies are adopted, the registry may only aid in speeding up their apprehension after they commit new crimes, rather than proactive prevention.

What currently exists?

Most states label sex offenders as level 1,2,3 sex offenders; however, these levels are not necessarily based on any empirical evidence; hence, they are arbitrary in nature

Identified level of risk is currently used in most states to determine the extent to which community notification applies (Internet, door-to-door notification, flyers, etc)

Risk level determinations vary greatly across the states--for instance, a person may be a level 1 in California, then move to Texas and be a level 2 or 3

Current system is confusing to citizens (and criminal justice practitioners)

Challenges and Costs?

Consensus by practitioners on appropriate risk assessments to be utilized

Access to necessary information to complete risk assessment by practitioners in jurisdictions across the country

Costs to develop task force and project oversight (Possibly Safe NOW Project)

Overall, a cost effective strategy to direct local and state prevention and management resources to the population that poses the greatest risk

States and local jurisdictions could save money by developing focused strategies on the most at-risk sex offenders, rather than trying to evenly distribute funds and resources across the sex offender registry.

Can it be done? What process could be most effective?

Prior to the creation of a national sex offender registry, the system was too fragmented to adopt standards.

YES! Finally possible because of the implementation of a national sex offender registry!

Much like Homeland Security has identified national standards around levels of threat (with the use of colors), it is practical and necessary to create national standards that differentiate levels of risk among the growing sex offender registry

A Task Force should be created to develop recommendations for National Sex Offender Classification Standards

Identify and test Pilot program in diverse settings

established within the Department of Justice, under the authority of the Attorney General

The Task Force could be an initiative sponsored by the newly created "Office on Sexual Violence and Crimes Against Children"